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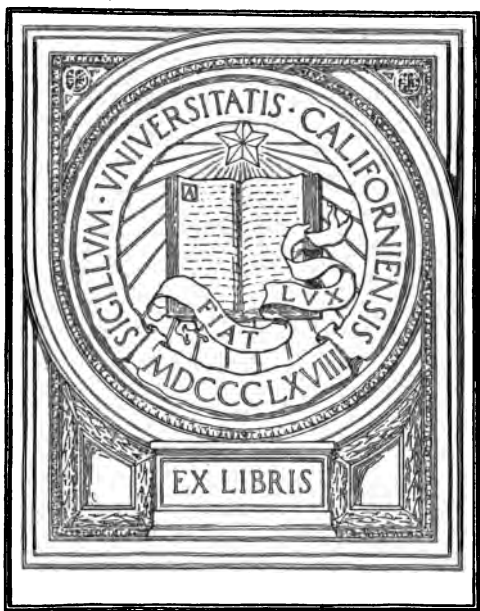
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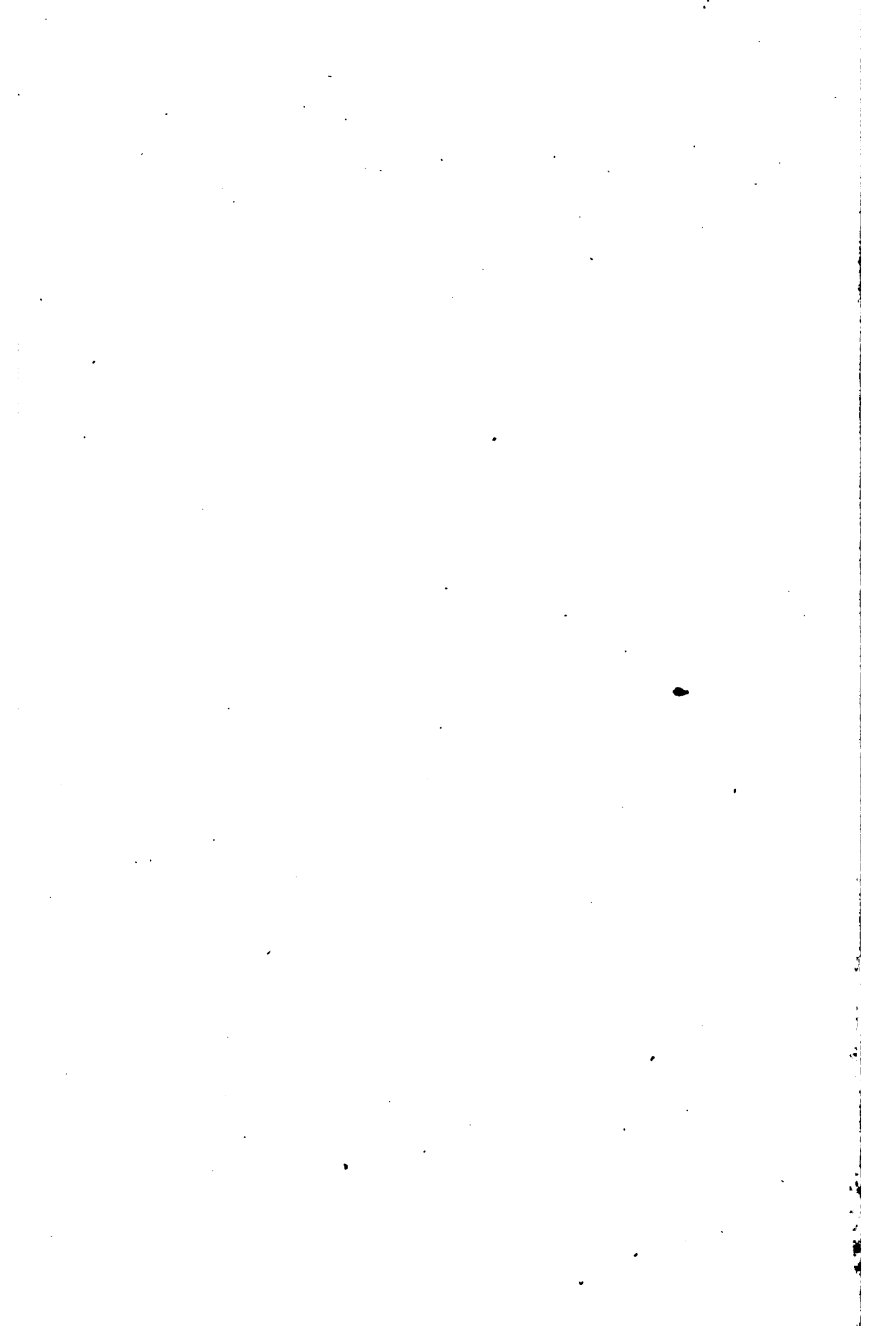
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Ernest Catley

EVENING AT ARNSIDE

THE OLD ROAD FROM SPAIN

BY

CONSTANCE HOLME

AUTHOR OF

"CRUMP FOLK GOING HOME," "THE LONELY PLOUGH"

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And travel the uncharted."

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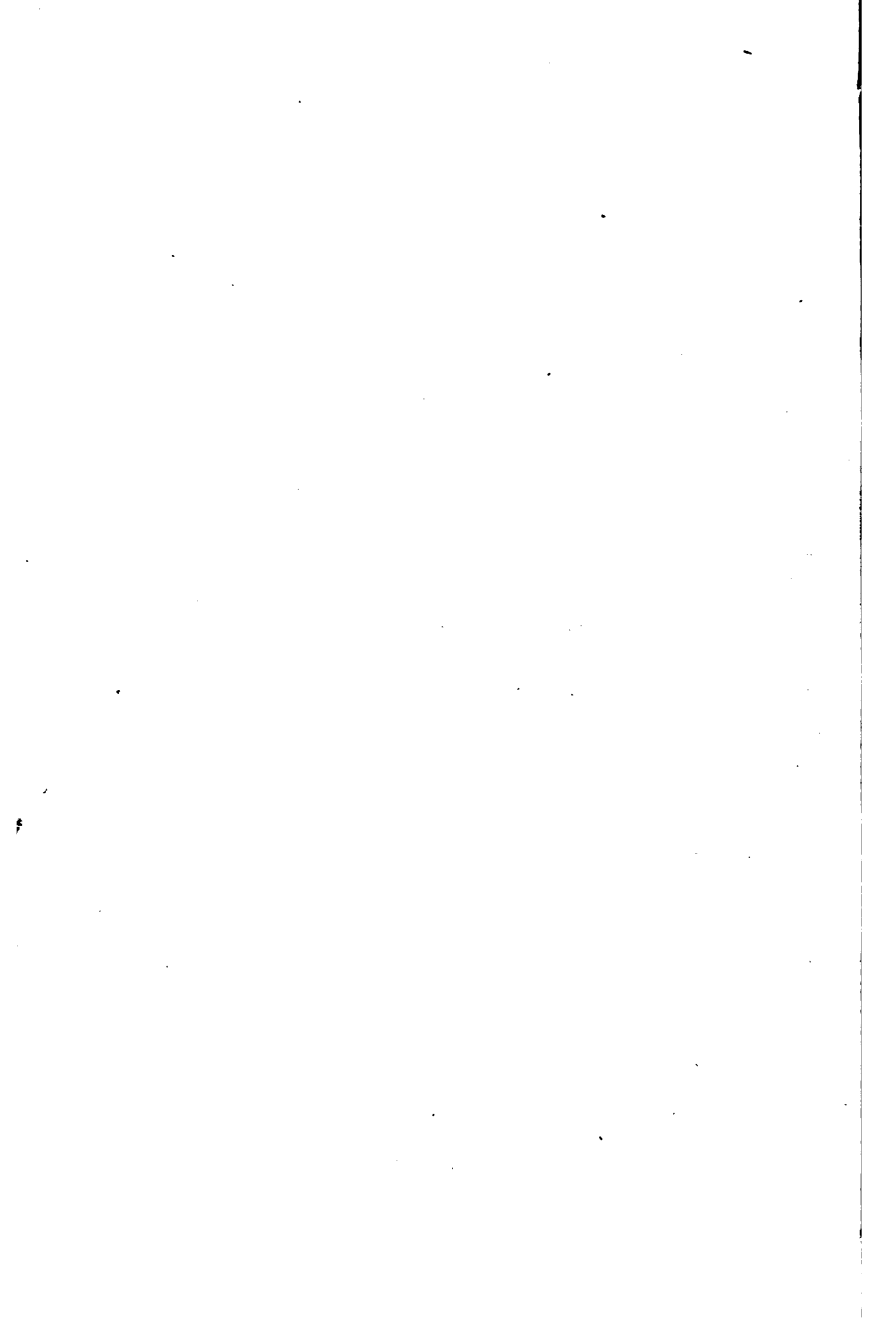
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TO
THE SPANISH TRADITIONS
ON
BOTH SIDES OF THE FAMILY

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THE OLD ROAD FROM SPAIN.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Luis Huddleston came to Ireleth in the clear September evening, it was in no spirit of pleasant greeting or of old association. Rather, he felt himself deliberately marooned, cast away and abandoned for all time. He stood, for a moment, looking along the level mile to Fallowfield Bridge, raised like a door between him and what lay beyond. A door shut in his face, and the face of his desire ; for beyond was the life which he had known and loved, and all the glamour of the south.

He was met at the station by his brother Rowland, a short, thin, nervous man, over fifty years of age, with a clipped grey beard and kindly, restless eyes. He was talking chattily to a porter when the train drew up, and he went on talking chattily as he grasped his brother's hand. Luis answered in courteous but abbreviated replies, across a barrier of long separation, different experience, outlook, and thought.

Eldest and youngest, with more than twenty years between them, they were, to all intents and purposes, complete strangers. From the very first they had been swept apart. While Rowly stayed on the family place, training for his father's shoes, Luis, motherless at two years old, had gone to his grandmother in Kent. Her Huddleston marriage, of which she seldom spoke, had

been more peculiarly trying than most, and she did not encourage the boy in memories of either family or place. His visits home had been few and far between, and when, later, he entered the diplomatic service and went abroad, the ties with his kin had loosened, every year. His father's death, followed by that of his grandmother, had finally severed his bond with England, and especially with the England of his race. Now, however, he had been called back, taken by the shoulders, and set with unwilling feet towards the north.

"Jolly to see you, I'm sure!" Rowly was saying, in his chatty voice. "I've been wanting to get you here for some time, but you were always just running away again across Channel. You'd a career, of course—one had to think of that; and, then, I'm a busy man myself. Hadn't always time to run up on the few occasions when you *were* in town. Astonishing how the years go by, when you've your hands full! But now you're here at last, and quite of your own accord. Very jolly, I'm sure!"

He snatched at a kit-bag, and hurried towards the gate, talking indiscriminately to his brother and the porter and a little Cocker spaniel effusively obstructing the way. A train came in at that moment on the up line, discharging a little crowd of folk, who stared with interest at the Huddleston guest, with his foreign air of dignity and reserve, and his foreign yet familiar face. Hats were touched to Rowland, who acknowledged heartily, wedging greeting and question into his tripping flow of talk, but Luis found more than one pair of eyes fixed curiously upon himself, and a very old farmer gave him a special personal salute. They stood aside as Rowly and the bag bustled through; partly from respect, partly, also, from desire to view the

stranger from behind. The country loves its legends, and Luis set a seal on a famous one as he moved.

The Thorns dog-cart was waiting outside the railings, together with a spring-cart for the luggage. Rowly hurried from one to the other, ordering and demonstrating, while his brother waited in the road, indifferent, apathetic, infinitely tired and oppressed. The little crowd stirred now, and filtered past him into the country, throwing side-glances at the stranger with the grave, dark face. The very old farmer saluted him again, saying, "Good even to you, Mr Gaspar!" peering at him with dim, time-betrayed eyes, and Luis stared and then smiled, a brief, brilliant smile that for an instant made him look boyish and gay. His grandfather had been Gaspar, he remembered now; one of the Spanish Huddlestons, like himself.

Huddlestons of Thorns had had this strain ever since the days of Queen Bess, when a waif from a Spanish ship had been flung upon Cunswick Fell in a night of terror and storm. He did not know much about the family, but he knew that. The foreigner, adopted in place of a lacking and necessary son, had found a home and a wife at the fell farm-house, and from that date the family type was changed. In every second or third generation came a Huddleston apparently of a distant, southern race, of a totally different breed; and even where the northern stock triumphed in colouring, the alien had a habit of showing in their heels. Walking behind them, you could see them pick up their feet with an almost cat-like elasticity and spring.

Nor did the legend stop at the men. Even the modern books had the tale that, from forty small sheep, swum ashore from a Spanish wreck, the present Herdwick breed came in straight descent. It was a hardy, agile

breed, admirably suited to the fells. He knew that, too, although he could not imagine how. He began to wonder how much other knowledge, inherited or acquired, would have to grow upon him before his environment became real or in any sense his own. Not that it mattered, even temporarily, just at present ; permanently, it would not matter for a long time yet.

Rowly, it seemed, had nothing of the far-off strain, nor had it touched his younger brothers, lately and untimely dead. They had been fair, placid people, apparently destined to a cheerful longevity unexpectedly cut off, but Luis had thrown back from the start. The look of him, a black-eyed, solemn baby, had at once claimed a stranger name from the family supply. Later, he had been an olive-cheeked, supple boy, by turns passionate and immeasurably reserved, infinitely removed from all at Thorns but the grandfather whose memory still coloured the country tales. In every sense he was apart, and his very occasional letters had scarcely served to re-string the early bond. His last, offering himself for a visit, had surprised Rowly into being late for a Board meeting—a most deplorable event. And even when it had him in the flesh, the Board had been denied its rightful due of his entire mind. It had come home to the master of Thorns that this stranger was now his heir, and, as such, must be shown the ropes in good time. His brothers' deaths had given him a shock, setting him for once watching life as it swept by, instead of hurrying with the throng. Some day, perhaps soon, he would pause for good, and life would fling on, without so much as looking back. Yes, it was time that Luis learned the fit of the family shoes. He told himself that he was glad of this opportune visit, but at that Board meeting he had felt elderly and a little cold.

Having settled the luggage to his satisfaction, he came back to the dog-cart, and offered his brother the reins, but found them refused. As he took them himself, he hoped, in his little, worrying way, that Luis was still sufficiently English to put the brute creation first. They were not like that in Spain; so he had always heard. It was impossible, one would think, to dislike either horses or dogs, but there were actually people who did. He himself was quite absurd about both, and was thoroughly put upon by both. He was comforted when Luis, with a set, courteous attempt, began to talk of a horse he had left behind in Madrid; still more comforted when his hand went out to the Cocker at his feet, whose wide smile and benevolent turn of the head seemed to suggest that he was conducting, not only this particular drive, but the changing lights on the landscape as well.

Rowly relaxed, flicking at a fly with a sigh of content. He still felt terribly shy of his strange guest, whom he had mentally proposed to lead in the way he should go, but a warmth of affection ran through him, as it had a habit of doing, on the slightest excuse. He was amazingly glad to see him, after all. A man could be proud of a brother like this, even though he did hark back to an uncomfortable likeness which refused to be suppressed. Certainly, he was good to look at; distinguished, too, with that air of having seen things and forgotten all about them until the need for remembering them should arise. There was something else, too, something unconsciously patrician, which must surely come from the imported strain. The Huddleston stock was good, sound though old, but it was not aristocratic. The family had been yeoman until the beginning of the eighteenth century, living in the farm-house still standing

on the slope of the fell. From the farm-house you could see the bay, twinkling distantly beyond its edge of marsh, but the Huddleston who had built and entailed the later Hall had placed it where the woods came in between. He was a wise man, with a Spanish Huddleston for heir. He had not wished him to look at the sea.

Now again there was a Spanish Huddleston for heir, with all the legendary brilliance and grace. He was clever, too, Rowly recalled. They—others of his vague informants—had predicted for Luis a career. It was not everybody who could say that; not everybody, even, who had a brother who could say that. He himself had had a busy life, but you could not call it a career. Luis would do something really worth while. Yes, he felt not only affectionate, but richer and more important and proud.

The only thing was that, when he was gone, the Career would come into conflict with Thorns. The estate was small but comfortable, picturesque and compact, and there was plenty of money for its needs. It had been well cared for in his father's day, while, in Rowly's, generosity was carried to the point of the absurd. The place was inexpressibly dear to him, all the dearer, perhaps, because of certain treacherous hankerings in his youth, and he did not like to think that, after his time, the house might stand empty for years. You never knew, either, what tenants or people left in charge might do. They grew to think that the place belonged to them, and to behave as they would certainly not have behaved if they had been born to it as their own. They might let his carefully-barbered turf grow ragged and wild, or demand a partition in the Mauve Room. . . . Of course it would be a hard problem for Luis, who had never expected to come into

the property at all, and had spent a great part of his time in Spain. It was possible that he might prefer his secretaryship at the British Embassy in Madrid, with ambassadorial visions, or, at least, of a *Chargé d'Affaires*. Wyndham Horne had been a friend of his grandmother's and would see that he got on. It certainly looked as though Thorns might be left in the lurch, but, for the present, Rowly decided, there was no need to trouble about that. He was a busy man, of course, as he had said, but he was not old. Luis, looking tired and ill, had none of the flagrant arrogance of youth ready to thrust its elders into the grave. Beside him he felt broad and countrified and very healthy and strong. It almost seemed as if he were the better man of the two. At all events, he need not contemplate abdication just yet.

He had actually ceased to chatter while he worried through his thoughts, but Luis was scarcely conscious of the break. He had no greeting for the land around as they turned towards the fells; but looked vacantly along the white road, in spirit many hundred miles removed. The corn was bright in all directions, and over the curving meadows the shadows slipped in airy sleighs, but he kept his empty eyes on the ground. Rowly glanced about him all the way—looked, it seemed, at every stick and stone and ear and blade, pointing comments with his whip, but Luis found nothing that called to himself. Only, when they came at last to the half-circle of the fells, where the heather was steeped and flushed with rose, his eyes lifted in spite of him, though his heart did not swell in the beauty and the live peace. The evening land at harvest did not speak to him, for his love was elsewhere. He felt nothing but a bored dislike for this corner in the hills, so remote

from the central pulses of the world. It was fair enough, some might have said, but it had nothing of the glamour of the land he had left ; and when the winter came, sweeping the tame blue out of the sky, and the pink from the heather-coating of the fells, filling the rifts with continual snow, harshening every line and deadening every sign of life . . . he shivered before the picture he had raised. Well, at least it was not winter as yet, and he would always be able to get away.

"Couldn't have fitted it in better!" Rowly was saying, for the fourth time. "The train was well up to schedule, so there was no hanging about and getting worried, and wondering where there'd been a hitch. I had to rush the District Council a bit, but I wasn't going to let anybody meet you but myself. Must say Dawson keeps his gates in shocking bad order, and not two of them painted alike ! I brought the cart so that you could look round a bit and take things in ; the car gets along so fast you don't know you're there. Shouldn't have thought Prill could afford that new-pattern reaper, but of course it was a help when his wife lost her mother, last spring. Quite an occasion, you know, your first visit here as the next man to follow on. Perhaps we should have run to an arch, but I hardly think it was the thing. I hope you'll like the place and all that, when once you've got to know it out and out. It's not a dukery, of course, but it's quite jolly, and it's been seen to all right. I don't think you'll find much to complain of, when your own turn comes along."

Luis roused himself to emphatic speech.

"Why, do you know, I've scarcely thought of it at all ! I suppose I do count now, but I don't seem able to grasp the fact, and I can't say that I feel anything but regret. I never looked to spend any of my life here,

though it's more than good of you to have me to stop. Really, I don't believe that it will ever come my way! You'll be living at Thorns in a green old age, long after I have followed the rest."

Rowly shook his head, though his eye brightened.

"My dear fellow, consider the years I can hand you, and all that! I'm a busy man, too, as perhaps I may have said; county work, you know, and, of course, the affairs of the estate. They always seem to run round in a ring, like the thing with its tail in its mouth that symbolises something else. Young Faussett gives me a hand with those, though I don't know that he's very go-ahead, but of course he's always jolly and kind. Must see about having those stiles widened, by the way. Old Simon complains that he can't take his favourite walk, now that he's getting old and stout. You never know when a busy man may drop out—strain on the heart and all that; not that it matters in the least. I'm quite ready to go when I'm called, or at least I shall be, in a few weeks' time, when the shows are over, and one or two things that I want to get in hand. It was astonishing how the boys went, when nobody was even thinking of such a thing, or worrying about them at all. John was with his regiment at York—appendicitis—the usual thing, of course; and Tom—well, Tom's was a motor-car—more or less the usual thing, too. All the same, it came very hard. I don't know that I always quite believe it, even yet."

They were passing the wall of a little churchyard, and he pulled up with a jerk, pointing across to a green mound under a young tree, where his brothers lay, so that Luis might look at it with his unseeing eyes. The news of their deaths had come to him but distantly in Spain, scarcely breaking a gap in his fence of human

life, for they had met so seldom that he had a thousand other memories more real. He could not visualise them with any ease, or thrill to any pang of tragedy or pain. He was sorry for their unaccomplished lives, which had seemed to offer them so much, but it was impossible that he should feel as Rowly felt, with his childlike, wondering air of loss. To the younger they were little more than mere names, blotted out by a ruthless hand; but the elder knew that they had taken with them some vital part of himself, loosening his own hold on life, and hinting that he, too, had already lived too long.

"It seems a waste," Luis said, with mechanical regret. "And I'm ashamed to say I'm of very little use myself. The fact is, I've knocked up, and been cleared out for a rest, so I thought I would see if you could take me in. It was no use stopping in Spain—I should only have been fretting to get back—and I felt I should like to look you up."

"Kind of you, I'm sure!" Rowly turned in his seat with an appreciative beam. He had another glorious moment of feeling very healthy and broad. "Of course this was distinctly your place. Really jolly of you to think of me straight away. Should have been quite upset if you had gone to anyone else. You've been overworking, I suppose . . . very easy thing to do . . . there's so much simply shouting to be done. Still, you can be as quiet as you like, at Thorns—not that I'm particularly quiet myself. I'm often so pressed that I don't know where to turn, but I needn't worry you with that. You'll get plenty of it and to spare when your own time comes to take hold."

"I'm depressing you, I'm afraid!" Luis smiled his quick smile. "You seem determined that the

future is very near. Please don't consider the—the position at all. It makes me feel interfering and rather low-down. And it's absurd, you know. You're a young man yet." He nodded towards the company of graves over the low wall. "Plenty of my brand of name, just there."

"Yes." Rowly's eyes wandered from stone to stone, from Inigo to Sebastian, Gaspar, Fernando, Manuel, Luis, with a look at once deprecatory and proud. "Yes. I suppose one notices them a good deal, because they're strange, up here, but, as a matter of fact, they're a pretty fair crowd. It's curious that they should be, all things considered, but they always came back to be buried, if they could."

"I don't know much about the family," Luis said, "except how some of us come to look as we do. I suppose there's a grain of truth in it somewhere, if one could really trace it back. In Spain they would never believe that I didn't belong. Do you mean that these gentlemen were often abroad?"

Rowly threw him a side-glance and wrinkled his brow.

"Well, perhaps it's nicer to put it like that. Not that they didn't care for the place. They were divided in their affections, that was all. They were always wanting to be off, and finding the other end the wrong one when they got there, but they came home to be buried, as I said, which was rather jolly of them, on the whole. Look here—you're tired. We'd better move on. I'm an ass to be jawing you to death like this."

His tug at the reins was rather hurried, suggesting that he moved away from something other than the actual spot, and the subject was dropped—completely, it seemed—while he chattered of weather and crops. At the end of five minutes he made a pause—or what

might be considered a pause, with him—and then broke out in a different place.

"Fond of sport?" he inquired jerkily, looking straight before him with an air of nervous strain, much as if he were asking whether Luis had a weakness for throwing bombs. "Ride, I think you said. Shoot? Motor?" The last word seemed to explode. "Boat?"

"Oh, yes, I've shot when I had the chance, but I don't drive a car. I'm afraid my education isn't up-to-date. I've rambled a good deal in Spain, and for that you need either a horse's legs or your own. I've sailed a bit, though—generally at San Sebastian in the summer. I missed it, this year, but, as a matter of fact, I'm rather keen. You'll remember, of course, that our grandmother's money came my way, so I'm not dependent on my secretarial screw. We're near the coast, aren't we, at Thorns? I've forgotten whether they do anything here."

"Oh, no!" Rowly shot out, and then hedged, prodded by his love of truth. "Bay, you know, that is, though we don't see it, if we can help. Fishing, of course—mussels and shrimps, and trippers in the summer months. Dangerous . . . very unsafe. . . . I mean the sands, you understand. Quicksands and banks; wouldn't suit you at all. Season's over, anyhow, and you say you've got to keep quiet. You mustn't let me fuss you too much, running in and out. I've always something on hand . . . one must do what one can. I'm glad you think I look young."

He sat straighter in his seat, telling himself that he had escaped a difficult *impasse* with some skill. Queer how the old liking always came out, as unmistakable as the type of face! The rest of them would scarcely as much as set foot on a flat-bottomed punt, though the

other hankering might well enough be there. Since he looked young, however, the problem might be shelved along with that of the Career. The drive and the bright evening had refreshed him after his day's work, as well as the warming sympathy of kin. It would be pleasant to have somebody about the still house, opposite to him at dinner, moving through the grounds ; to watch him getting better and growing at home, both of which would follow in due course. He knew now that he had rather dreaded his brother's coming, and was unfeignedly glad to find that he had no cause. Why, Luis had made him feel he was good for another thirty years, at least ! Yes, he was young, to-night, glad of his life, his position, his power of honest service and his right to exist. There was so much to do, and he was always so glad to do it. Well, with luck, he was going to have the chance.

Over a drop in the hedge the Hall came into sight, a cream-faced, porticoed mansion set in its wooded park, with a fine avenue twisting on the gradual slope to the open lodge gates. Beyond the far wall of the park was the farm on the last heave of the fell, a grey, ancient-lived thing, with mullions and diamond lights, looking down on the larger dwelling at its feet, the mushroom growth of scarce two hundred years. Behind the farm, green fields sloped gently—small fields, walled high with uncemented stone ; and then the rough heights sprang up, poising great boulders upon green and purple sides, scarred with the channels of the ghylls. And for miles along the steep flanks, and over dip and curve, and up to the clear, tremendous tops, was Huddleston land, where the ancient Herdwick flock was heafed.

They had seen more than one house as they drove, more than one carriage and car, and over more than

one wall greetings had passed, with many a glance at the guest as he went by, but he scarcely noticed them, drifting away on his own tide of thought. He had never known the folk, and he did not want to know them now. They meant nothing to him, either as individuals or types, nor did he care what ancestry, what character and life, had gone to make them what they were. He looked at Thorns as it came up, but with little interest and no stirring of the blood. It was merely a rest-house on the road, where for a while he must possess his patient soul.

Absorbed, almost half-asleep, the swerving of the horse came upon him as a shock. He heard the groom at the back spring up with a smothered word, and saw the Cocker at his feet suddenly crouch and cower, though there was nothing apparent to account for such alarm. They were close to the gates, by now, and the smoke above the lodge roof struck a note of homely content and calm, though the door was shut, and nobody looked out. In the highway, blocking their approach, was a closely-huddled group of sheep, strong, sturdy, defiant little beasts, with black hoofs and greying faces, rid of their fleeces nearly three months before. Over the park wall he had a glimpse of others, scattered here and there, part of the landscape, that was all. He looked at his brother, and found him unperturbed, missing the glance which had been flung at him first.

The horse was backing now, shivering, and trying to turn, and Martin had gone to its head. His grey eyes in his brown face seemed to have darkened with sudden feeling, or because of a blanching under the tan. Round the horse, as he wrenched at the bit, they were fixed upon his master, full of question and amaze.

Rowly gave one short, scarcely audible sigh, and then laughed. It was a chatty laugh, very commonplace and a little inane, concealing nothing and suggesting less. He smiled cheerfully at his brother, pulling at the rein.

"Frightfully sorry you should be kept like this! Fact is, this fool of a horse simply won't face a sheep. It isn't often, though, that we get them down here. Easy, boy, steady—easy—there, there! All right, Martin, let him come round. Mr Luis and I will walk."

He thrust the reins into the up-reached but reluctant hand. The horse, now that it was turned, still trembled, but had ceased to fret and rear. Rowly climbed down over the wheel.

"Hope you don't mind, my dear fellow? Really, I'm quite ashamed! It isn't far up to the house, and one can stretch one's legs. I'd like to show you the park as we go along, if you're not too tired. It's quite jolly in the avenue; at least, it will be, when the leaves get turned. I always look forward to the autumn tints——" He broke off, as if somebody had hacked his speech across. "Well, Martin, what is it? Speak out, man—speak out!"

The groom made an effort. His muddled sentences took form.

"I can make him face the sheep, sir, if you'll let me try! He shouldn't be given in to, like that. At any rate, let me drive you round to the back."

Rowly shook his head without meeting his eye.

"Thank you, Martin, but I don't want the poor brute upset. Nerves, you know—we've all of us got nerves. Some of us are frightened of spooks, and some of—well, just sheep. And I think we'll go on, now we're down. I always believe in going on."

He turned with a determination which seemed curiously absurd, and trotted away at his brother's side. The man watched them move off, the small, fussy figure, and the slim, lithe one, walking quickly and lightly, with a delicate precision and grace. The sheep broke away as they approached, with a miniature thunder of scudding little hoofs, and disappeared over the farther wall. There was scarcely a pause in Rowly's talk from the lodge gates to the avenue top, but his eyes moved sharply from side to side, as though his brain worked regardless of his tongue. Now and then, when a woolly shape came upon him round a tree, Luis had a swift impression that he stiffened and recoiled, but it was too vague to take root. Perhaps he was easily startled, even by a sheep. Hadn't he mentioned something about nerves?

"It isn't often they get down," he was saying again, almost as if the fact deserved stress. "Huddleston sheep, you know; the family sheep, the Spanish breed. You can't tell the ear-mark, perhaps, but there's always the H brand. Very jolly mutton they make, too—quite the very best you could want. The flock runs to about four thousand—let, of course, with the farm. I hope you don't mind our little walk, though it seems altogether too bad. Astonishing how that horse behaved—wonder we weren't all turned out! Dogs, now—I've had them run from a sheep—young ones that have seen them when they're wild, but you don't expect a horse to go to pieces like that. I'm sure you'll be glad to get up to the house, and start in keeping quiet. Jolly old trees, aren't they?—very even and full. If we get a frost, they'll turn in a single night."

They had reached the entrance to the drive, by now, and he glanced back without ceasing his talk. His

face, averted from his brother towards the park-lands and the fields, had nothing in common with his speech. It wore a look of awed piteousness and sheer dismay, as if the shade of a shadow had crept between him and them.

CHAPTER II

THE serene, square-fronted house looked west across its ordered lawns, its beech hedges and sheaves of autumn flowers, catching the light of the dropping sun in the cool dark eyes of its cool cream face. The avenue came up on its right, leading into the hedged drive. On its left were the stable-courtyard, the rose and rock gardens, the lavender walk, and the yew alley. At its back ran the huge length of the kitchen garden, sunk between its deep, warm walls, and flanked by the neat cottages of the men. To both north and south of the house was a plantation of larch, emphasising its air of delicate cleanliness and innocent peace.

Rowly had hurried forward when they entered the drive, making for the butler waiting on the steps. His brother, following, caught a flood of unintelligible speech, to which the man made answer only once. He seemed a very wraith of a butler, Luis thought, toned into sheer nothingness by contrast with his chatty master; strangely rigid and white for one not past his youth. In his eyes, as they moved to the guest, was a look which the latter could not fathom, vehement yet aloof, as if some horror had been forcibly dismissed, leaving only its shadow-image mirrored in his face. The three went up together into the wide, dim-cornered hall.

Rowly's laugh crackled about them as they passed in, and the flow of his talk was still unstemmed. It was

almost as if he tried, by sheer vocal assault, to numb their judgment before it could act. His voice travelled in little jerks, pausing to gather any pressing thought, much as a tram-car jerks and stops, ruled by the umbrella-waves of any would-be fare. He looked older, somehow, now that he was in the hall; greyer, slightly bent, more deeply lined.

"Crane, you remember Mr Luis, of course?—no, well, perhaps you don't. Barnes would be with us, I suppose, when he was here before, and that's a long time ago, now. Excellent man, Barnes—went clean out of his mind; and all because he couldn't get his shirt-fronts laundered to suit. Nerves, of course, all nerves. We're all of us all nerves. Really, I hope you understood about that brute of a horse? A long time, Crane, since we saw him last, but perhaps all the jollier now he's here. The only trouble is that he isn't at all well. We must coddle him a bit, feed him up and all that, until we get him thoroughly fit. The school-master called, you say?—surely it isn't the drains again! I studied the system myself throughout, and thought it very jolly indeed. Tea ready, I suppose, and I hope you've put it in the Mauve Room? Now I come to think of it, I forgot to have any lunch."

The dining-room was on the right of the hall as they went in, with the billiard-room through it, up a couple of steps. The hall was very broad and high, making an open setting for the glory of the house, the heavy staircase, carved, panel after panel, with the bold curves of Herdwick horns. Between it and the dining-room, a baize door led to the servants' quarters and the gun-room, looking up the fell. On the other side was the passage leading to the library, which shared, with the Mauve Room, the full length and breadth of that end of

the house. The drawing-room (as it really was) took most of the space, with a long array of windows facing the sloping stretches of green. It was a very large room, almost too large for the rest, but it had nothing of the stiffness of a show-room or the draughty emptiness of a lounge. In winter it was warmed by its two splendid grates; in summer it was bright but airy, sun-bathed but cool. A study in many shades of purple, from the dark softness of the carpet to the pale silk of the blinds, it had the air of delicate finish, of detailed fineness of care, which usually speaks of a woman in the house. On the mauve sheen of the mantel were miniatures and warm little ivories, and the pictures on the shining walls were scraps of brighter lands away. Luis stared with some surprise from the grand piano to the big, silk-shaded lamps, from the Michaelmas daisies in their mauve, iridescent bowls to the orchids in others of heavy cut glass; finally, to his brother, in his somewhat shabby clothes, sunk a little in his silk-upholstered chair. (Yes, he was certainly older than he had thought; harassed and tired, and worn before his time.) Rowly caught his travelling eye, and looked embarrassed, even ashamed.

“Hardly a man’s room, of course, especially a dull old stager like myself, but it happens to be a fancy of mine to have it rather nice. I expect you’ll think me a bit of an ass, but I haven’t time for much in the way of hobbies, and this is always on the spot. Crane and I settle the colour-schemes between us, and flatter ourselves we do it rather well. We’ve no end of sport over the patterns, but they’re deuced awkward, sometimes; get into your pocket, and come out at Board meetings—that sort of thing, you know. You see, there isn’t a lady of the house, but we like to keep a room for her,

all the same. Pity she isn't here now, so that she could look after you a bit, and see that you get all you want. What do you say to a few days in bed, and perhaps a look in from Dr Myre? Nothing like a day or two in bed for smoothing you down and setting you up. I often do it myself, when there isn't a meeting or anything of the sort, but then there always is."

"Oh, thanks, I shall get along all right. I'll take things quietly, for a while, if I may, but I think I would rather do it downstairs. Please don't let me trouble you in the least."

"Why, my dear fellow, of course it's your right! Who else should see to you when you're ill? Only wish I could do it better, that's all. The place is your home, as well as mine. One of these days it will be yours, out and out."

Luis looked definitely distressed.

"I wish you wouldn't harp upon that particular string! I wish you'd forget I come in at all. It's yours to enjoy for many a long year to come."

"You never can tell." Rowly tapped his cup with a fidgety spoon. "One should be prepared. I always like to be prepared; makes things so much jollier all round. But of course you've got to think of your career. Now and then, I've heard quite jolly things about you, here and there."

"Well, I like the life, and I'm rather keen to get on. I must confess I'm kicking at this enforced rest, but I suppose it will work out all right. I don't feel very cheerful, at present, but I haven't got my bearings, just yet. I won't annoy you more than I can help, but if I get to grouching or anything of the sort, you must just make an end of it, and throw me out."

"Oh, you'll settle all right!" Rowly said, his tone more

cheerful than his face. "Daresay it looks dull to you, just now, but you'll find plenty to do as soon as you're fit. Fact is, in the country you simply can't get everything in. The people round are quite jolly, if you don't ask too much. You get used to them, you know, like anything else that you take for better or worse. There's the estate, too; I'd like you to look into that, as well. Sport, of course, if you care about it, and, if not, there's always charity, by the yard. Intellect, too—debating societies and all that. You might give a lecture at the village Institute—what do you say?—but we'll leave it a little later on." He pulled himself up with a jerk, reverting to the other side of the shield. "But I mustn't tempt you or try to tie you down, because of course you'll be wanting to get back."

"It's early days to think of that, yet. I'm glad, at least, to have the chance to renew the ancient ties. I find it's something to own a brother, after all."

"Kind of you—very kind!" Rowly brightened and looked pleased. "Of course you can't be expected to know, living away so long, but there's nothing quite the same as having people of your own. The world's never quite empty, as long as they're alive. And of course I'm glad—I can't tell you how jolly glad. . . . I'd like you to stay, you know, to stay for good. . . ." he broke off sharply, looking away. . . . "but of course I'm simply talking like an ass. You've no time to waste on me, with all the big things you mean to do. There's your future to think of, and to keep in view. We've got to remember that."

He jumped up and went to a window, standing with his back turned, but swung round again at the crunch of tyres on the drive.

"Now, if that isn't good old Winder with the car!

I'd clean forgotten all about that Conservative gathering in Witham. I'm supposed to make a point of turning up, though of course I shouldn't be really missed. I'm Chairman of the Association, though, and—well, well, never mind. I'll telephone through that I can't come, and then we'll go on with our jolly chat."

Luis, however, would not permit him to stay. He was desperately tired, and, ungrateful as it seemed, longed to be free of his brother and his nervous talk. He had scarcely touched the little meal which Crane had prepared with such art, and was rapidly finding himself unable to cope with even a semblance of social exchange. Moreover, to that sense of strangeness which illness brings, of seeing the world through other and alien eyes, of being helplessly exposed to attacks upon both body and soul, were added a puzzle and oppression which were not of himself at all, but seemed to come wholly from without. From the moment he had left the train, he had been conscious of exile, of a terrific change unjustified by the simple event, of revolt and fear and capture and wrath and hate. He had ascribed it to his health, and had looked for it to pass, but it had not passed. The innocent house had promised peace, but there was no peace. Something had happened, was happening, all around. He was almost afraid to be left, yet hungered to be alone, and was glad when Rowly yielded at last, distressed, yet obviously drawn to his post.

"Really, my dear fellow, I hardly know what to say! It seems so abominable to leave you like this, but you'll understand when your own time comes along. One is nothing to look at, and very little use—I'm speaking of myself, of course—but people like one to be there. They think you're slack if you don't turn up, or that

you've got a swelled head or taken to drink. Everybody's expected to turn up at things, even if they bore each other to tears; that's what keeps the county together, don't you know. There's a new novel on that table, and Crane will fetch you the cigarettes. We don't keep them in here, because of the Lady of the House that might have been, but of course smoke, if you wish. I may be rather late back, so please have dinner just when you like, and don't on any account wait up. It's awfully jolly of you to say you don't mind, but I feel quite desperately ashamed."

He got out into the hall at last, and asked Crane for a brush. Through the half-open door Luis could see him revolving as he talked, alternately offering the brush for use behind, and grabbing it back to operate in front.

"Haven't time to change, Crane, but perhaps I shall do. Think I'll do, Crane?—what's my tie? Can't for the life of me remember whether it's the brown or the grey. Green, do you say?—oh, that's all right. Mustn't go sporting the Radical colour, that's all. When did I last have a new rig-out?—I suppose I've got it written down. I must try to run up to town, one of these days, when I'm not quite so pressed. Anyhow, this is suitable, isn't it? I always like to be suitable. See that Mr Luis has all he wants, and try to make him thoroughly at home. He's a credit to the house, Crane—got a career. We can't do too much for him, you and I."

The two figures moved across the hall, and of the conversation that followed only snatches reached the Mauve Room. Crane was talking now in low, agitated tones, over which Rowly's voice leaped in disconnected speech.

"It's all right, Crane—really it's all right! A hundred years hence, you know, less than a hundred years. . . . Soon over, perhaps—now, my dear fellow, don't! . . . Only fair, don't you think? One must do what one can. . . . Rely on you to manage the rest. . . . Porridge of sorts—something like arrowroot or bread and milk. The Lady of the House would know, if she were here. Perhaps it's as well she isn't, Crane . . . perhaps it's as well."

The door closed behind him, and the car drove away, but it seemed to Luis, left to himself, that it was a long time before Crane came back. However, he reappeared at last, distantly apologetic and frigidly calm, but the china clinked as he cleared it away, and his hand shook as he set the silver box on a carved stool. Once, Luis had a vision of a footman standing without, ready to receive the tray—a youth who seemed to be all staring eyes, pale cheeks and ruffled hair, but who was suddenly and forcibly removed. The question remained open as to which of them was not meant to see, which not intended to be seen.

He sat without moving for a very long time. The new book had advanced to another carved stand, but he did not draw it to his knee. He looked longingly at the cigarettes, but left them untouched, for at present he was forbidden to smoke, and, moreover, the flower-scented room breathed rebuke. His mind was running over the years, the friendly, charming years, bringing up always at this latest phase, as at a blocking wall. The future, it was said, was woven of the past, and to a repetition of that pleasant past he would assuredly return, but at the moment it seemed very far away. Things were happening, he had said to himself. *What things?* What if there had been no lockstitch in the

pattern of his life, so that, at a single pull, it had unravelled in his hands, waiting for destiny to weave anew?

How quiet it was in the big room!—through the whole house, in the garden, along the tranquil land beyond; quiet which should be all healing, all nerve-content. Yet he was not resting, he knew. His numbed body was indeed still, but his brain held a riot of rebellion and rage. He had the impulse to shriek and rave, to fling and smash, to jangle ivory keys and hurl carved stools through a shatter of shining glass. He was in a prison in a far land, among foreign faces and alien tongues; in a grave, a padded, silk-papered, purple grave, where a thick silence wrapped him round, and through closed glass doors he was mocked with a vision of the living earth. He strove with himself, straining his ears for some sound which might drag him to the surface, but the farther door in the hall was shut, and no one stirred in the room above, or spoke on the climbing stair. He suffered horribly; and then again was conscious that all this came from without. Yet from whose brain did it emanate, if not from his own?

There was nothing that might not be set down to the jarring machinery of his own overwrought mind. Nerves, as Rowly had said; they all had nerves. Yet Rowly himself was surely somewhat changed, not quite the simple countryman he had seemed at the station gate. At tea, he had swung between genuine welcome and obvious hints that the guest would be better away. Well, he had no need to fear that Luis meant to saddle himself on the place. He was not tied; he could leave at any moment he wished, but perhaps it would be as well to remain for a time. After all, this was his home, as Rowly himself had said, and at present he could not

face the effort of choosing elsewhere. He must concentrate upon his desire to get strong, so that his release might be all the sooner signed. If only the house were not so terribly still !

He got up at last, and opened a window, and was instantly aware of a sound which had not as yet met his ear. The wandered sheep were back on the fell, by now, and from every slope and face, every precipice and ravine, came the long, travelling mountain-wail. The chain of vibrations scarcely ever ceased. Throat after throat questioned and answered, called and replied, mournful, piercing, insistent, eternally unappeased. It seemed to Luis that it was the only sound in all the world, a sad voice calling through endless void to one who could not hear, the voice of perpetual exile, of everlasting complaint. The evening light dwelt on his thin, graceful figure and scornful, upheld head. In the delicate, dreaming room he was like a slender sword, fretting the edges of its silken sheath.

CHAPTER III

THAT night, a still September night, he dreamed of galleons and guns. Very early in the morning he awoke, and came through a long travel of wonder to the unexpected present. Sleep had frolicked away from the corners of his wide, green room, so at last he rose and looked out, threw up the sash to the live, young morning air and the pearly, visibly-growing day. For a while the oppression lifted from him, and his fretted spirit calmed in the great, waking quiet. It was as if the day's joy were issuing forth, fresh and unmixed, before any of the day's tasks had drawn from it, to sweeten harsher drink. His weariness of mind, together with his consciousness of ill, vanished before this friendly certainty of good, this almost tangible presence of living, pure delight. The very stillness, moving to an ordered growth of sound, seemed to hold the essence of a smile.

He watched the new sunlight come over the hill, and saw the diamonds spring out of the beck, the dark greys lift to purple and the paler greys to green, while the sheaves, below to his left, which had stood so moth-like in the evening dusk, took on their clean sun-dress of yellow gold. The fell before him gathered colouring and line, as if struck into meaning by a magic brush. The bare slopes stood up emerald beside the pink slopes of the heather; the grey walls ran shadowless along the steeps; the deep ghylls, where the crystal water

danced, were black as the thin earth-line of the distant tops, where each fine knife-edge cut sharply into the delicate sky.

Later, not so long after the day itself, he saw the farm awake. A thrill seemed to run through it, as if an electric summons had stirred the sleepers in their beds. A woman came into the yard, and called, and the sound was like that of a wound horn. She laughed, and the laugh came vividly on the bright air. He heard a dog bark, the clank of pails, and then the call again—clear-ringing sounds, all of them, striking almost too keenly upon his over-strung brain.

The machinery of the day was getting into gear without jar or jerk. So this life went always, he thought, slipping into oiled grooves with the dawn, and at sunset ceasing to be. It seemed as if no power of God or man could twist it into new forms, breaking the revolutions of Nature's droning wheel. By degrees, the happy mood left him, yielding to the nameless trouble of the night before. Again he felt chilled and numb, beating at a cage where courage fainted and ambition died. Life might be well enough here for those born to its passionless round, but for himself, as the quick, bright, laughing thing he had known, it was its mockery and its ghost.

He thought of his Spanish forbear, flung by the storm on the desolate northern shore. What had he felt, that waif in a cold, grey land, after the colour and light of Spain? How often had he stood by the unregarding sea, and wondered where the warmth and brilliance of his youth had fled? Little by little he must have let them go, until the foreign land which held him fast had fashioned a child of her own from the broken, ship-wrecked stray. There was nothing he

knew that he would not have to learn again—speech and ways, climate and trade and soil ; yes, even love itself must have worn a different guise here. Small wonder the alien strain had been so slow to absorb, so swift to predominate, even yet ! Had not every Spanish Huddleston, when he slept, laying aside the homespun of his daily life, woven himself a coat of many colours in his dreams ?

He was a long time in dressing, and came downstairs utterly out of tune, burdened by the headache and sense of quivering irritation he had lately grown to expect. Rowly was deep in his morning post, allowing an excellent breakfast to cool untouched. A begging-letter of many sheets spread itself over his plate, while various papers blocked the coffee and the toast. He jumped up, however, when he saw his brother, met him with a gust of inquiries, and proceeded to wait on him in person, colliding with Crane at every second step. He seemed fussier than ever, this morning, thinner, too, and more worn, as if he had been running a wild race with the night-hours ; a bundle of vibrant, anxious, kindly care, hungrily pinning Christian acts upon the flying skirts of Time. Luis forced himself to polite response, miserably conscious of protesting nerves.

“ Quite thought you would breakfast in bed ; doctor’s orders, perhaps, and all that sort of thing. I forgot to ask you before I went off. Now if only the Lady of the House had been here, she would have seen that you didn’t run any risks. I hope you got your cup of morning tea, and, by the way, how did you sleep ? If the room doesn’t suit, we’ll fix you elsewhere—a bed on the billiard-table, if you’ve a fancy that way. Must get you strong, you know, or the county will be saying that you starve abroad while I live at home on

the fat of the land. What do you say to a beaten-up egg at twelve o'clock?"

He went back to his seat at last, and Crane brought him fresh bacon, by some dexterous sleight of hand removing the papers from his immediate line of vision. A cup of pleasantly warm coffee came into being close to the master's hand.

"Thanks, Crane. Very jolly of you, I'm sure, to notice I'd forgotten the bacon. I suppose I did forget it, by the way, or did I eat it, after all? I don't always know. You went to bed early, Luis, I hope? We had a most successful evening in Witham. They were quite pleased to see me, perhaps because there was nobody else. The Member couldn't come, at the last minute, so I had to speak—longer, I mean, in order to fill up. Of course, I always say a few words, but everybody knows what they are. I think I got through all right, and there was a conjurer who helped things out a bit. The only drawback was that I hadn't had any dinner, and that makes one's thoughts wander, at times. Too bad to leave you, though, the moment you had arrived. I hope you didn't find the time drag?"

"I'm here to make it drag"—Luis made an effort to smile—"to study *mañana* as a duty and a science, instead of simply a bland excuse. I'm going to sleep and eat, and eat and sleep, move on a few yards, and then eat and sleep again, like those sheep of yours, browsing on the fell."

Rowly started slightly, and began to crumble his toast. His childlike, blue eyes searched his brother's face.

"Excellent idea—I'm glad you're taking it like that. Tell us what you'd like, and we'll produce it, if we possibly can. Must get you fit as fast as we know how. Then you'll be off, I suppose, as sharp as a gun?"

"Perhaps, by that time, I shall be too contented to move on!" Luis was still trying to be polite. "Just now, of course, I'm rebelling against everything within reach, especially that worst of all tyrants, one's own health."

"We're none of us as free as we think." Rowly breathed a quick, little sigh. "We're all of us tied by the leg, if it comes to that, though it's amazing how often we forget. We go on arranging things and making our jolly little plans, just as though we could do as we liked for as long as we wished, and then, of a sudden, come the pull and the surprise. Life's rather like a game of musical chairs, don't you think? No matter where the music stops, it's very seldom at the right place."

He sighed again, and drew the begging letter back to his plate, looking at its flowing phrases with an anxious frown, as though he saw them from a very long way off.

"This is from a poor chap who seems to be tied by more legs than one. Very jolly of him to write to me, I'm sure, and I must see what I can do to help him out. Quite an astonishing crowd of poor chaps in the world—I don't know whether you've noticed it yourself? At least, I seem to hear from a good many, here and there. Faussett thinks I'm inclined to be soft about them, but I fancy he only says it as a matter of form. He'd give away his last penny, himself. By the way, you'll see a good deal of him, knocking about. He helps me to keep an eye on the place—got a small one of his own, somewhere near. We talk things over, you know; extraordinary how it straightens them out. I've an A.O.S. meeting at Preston to-day, if you care to come along in the car. Important work, the A.O.S.—binding the farmers together, don't you know? Union

is strength . . . milk of human kindness . . . creameries and quick returns. Yes, yes, perhaps you're wiser to keep quiet. We'll have another jolly talk when I get back."

He stuffed the papers into his pocket with a nervous hand, caught up his cup, and hurried into the hall, Crane at his heels.

"I've promised some soup to somebody, but I can't for the life of me remember who. The laundress, perhaps—no, hers was port. Ask Mr William to find out, when he comes, and to write that testimonial I've promised to young Ward. He was boy here, wasn't he?—blacking and knives? I suppose I saw him about. Now he's wanting to try the railway, so he says—tickets behind a grill and all that. Well, he's a good mother, and he never mixed the boots at the biggest shoots, so he ought to be able to manage the change. Turner had better see about choosing the right spot for the new intensive poultry-house when it arrives. I bought it, you remember, from that very persuasive young man who called. And if the billiard-table committee comes up while I'm away, give it £10 from Letter B. in the new bureau. I've promised to look in somewhere, to-night, but I haven't an idea whether it's a football meeting or a class on First Aid. I want a word at the lodge, so I'll finish the coffee in the drive, and you can send Arthur after me for the cup. And whatever you do, see to Mr Luis, and don't let him get the blues. The Lady of the House, Crane, the Lady of the House! Don't forget you've got to take her place!"

He waved cheerily to his brother, and trotted down the steps into the golden harvest day, the precious Worcester balanced in his careless hand. Luis and the butler watched the procession out of sight—the master

gulping coffee in his fussy little stride, the smug, young footman stalking at his back, the long, blue car held drifting in the rear. So Rowly went forth to his day's work, intent on putting his little world to rights before the music stopped and flung him out of the game.

Left alone, Luis finished an attempt at breakfast, and studied the paper with a patient but remote eye. He took out his cigarette-case, and put it back again; picked up a book, and threw it down; sighed, and looked at the dawdling clock. He sauntered into the billiard-room, and played a few random shots; into the gun-room, and fingered the guns; into the library, and tapped the Yost. It was probably his duty to go out, but nothing in the prospect called him, and he might meet people who would talk. He did not want to talk. He wanted to brood upon his interrupted career, his nervous misery and bodily aches; to think of what he had left, of what he was losing, of the friends who, even now, might be drifting out of his life. It was possible to write to the latter, of course—more than one would want to know how he was—but he had nothing to say that could either interest or amuse, and at least he had sufficient self-respect to keep his sorrows out of black and white.

He looked at the crowded desk, at the new bureau, at the litter of papers, the reference-books and the files. Here was the centre of Rowly's busy little life; the powerhouse of his energy and haste. From here ran the spider-threads down which he raced, eager for unrewarding bites at county jobs. He was squandering the remnants of his strength in a passionate desire to serve, and was possibly achieving his end in his wasteful and scurrying way. Out of all that chatter and strain some accomplishment must surely come, some definite

if inadequate result from such painful lack of economy of effort ! Yet it was a limited life, when all was said. To Luis, as far as he could see, it seemed trivial and rather cheap. He had been lucky to get away before he, too, was cramped and grooved. Yet, after all, here he sat, a cog gone from the great wheel, while the world roared on its way, and all the strong men set their shoulders to its weight.

He turned to find himself observed by a fair, athletic, young man, with a clear and smiling face ; though, before the smile reached the pleasant eyes, like the sun gold-sheeting a gray hill-tarn, he had the impression of rapid recoil, such as he had noticed in Crane. So, he thought, suddenly, indifferently amused, they might have looked at Death, on his pale horse. . . . It passed, however, at once. As he stirred, the intruder approached ingratiatingly, but without haste, like one who finds all life good, yet slides it lightly through his hands.

" I hope you'll tell me, if I'm in the way ? I'll clear out at once, if I am, but perhaps you won't mind if I hunt for Rowly's notes ? There's a thing or two he wants me to look up that he hadn't time to see to, himself. I met him in the park, and he said I should probably find you in. I knew you were expected, last night. I'm Bill Faussett. Perhaps he mentioned I might turn up ? "

Luis met him with the foreign courtesy which was so altogether unlike his brother's. This was Rowly's other business-half, of course, with whom he was in the habit of talking things over. He seemed likeable enough, but Luis had no desire for his society, just now. Perhaps it would be as well to escape before the talking-over extended to himself.

" I'd better leave you in peace, in case you've some-

thing serious in hand. If you know I'm only just home, you'll understand that I'm rather terribly at a loose end. I've sampled all the rooms in turn, and ended by wandering in here, but I can just as easily wander somewhere else."

Bill's lips curved into a whimsical smile.

"I'd like it ever so much better if you'd stay! There's nothing frenzied about my morning's work, but it pleases Rowly to think I'm in charge. I lend him a hand when I'm not too busy hunting or helping my dear old mother to garden, and he gives me dumb waiters and volumes of Shakespere, at Christmas, in return. (He's my godfather, by the way. I don't know why, except that he and my own father were once thrown out of a trap together, coming home from a shoot. Fallowfield's my place—about a mile and a half. I hope you'll come over, any time you like.) He tried having an agent, at one time, but it simply didn't work at all. They worried each other to the verge of hysteria, each worrying about the other worrying, until the pace was simply terrific, on the principle that a bicycle goes faster downhill carrying two persons instead of one. Now, I'm a kind of drag on the wheel."

"I should say he needed something of the sort. Of course, I'm not in a position to judge, but I gather that he leads a somewhat strenuous life. I fancy I shan't see much of him while I'm here."

"Yes, his time is about filled up. He's one of those stock committee-people who are always in demand, because they're always on the spot, and make every cause their own. The worst of him is that he's in such a tearing hurry, all the time. He goes at things so fast that it's all he can do to stop when he gets to the other end. You've never seen him play billiards, I suppose?

He reminds me of a man chasing a flock of sheep with his hat."

For some reason he flushed sharply, bit his lip, and dug diligently in a drawer.

"I suppose that's rude. I'm sorry. But he wears himself out."

"Better than rusting, as no doubt he thinks. A man must surely take care to fill up his days, if he means to live his life in a place like this."

Bill glanced at him thoughtfully.

"You think it a Back o' Beyond, I expect, with its mental perspective all wrong when it isn't actually asleep? I suppose it must seem small and tiresome to you. Rowly told me that you'd been ill, and that you had a Career—I hope you don't mind my mentioning either fact? I expect, if the truth's known, you've been hurrying, too."

"One is young only once, and not that for very long. It doesn't do to drop out in the middle of your swing. I'd rather lose five years from the end of my life than part with a single one, just now."

"That's too big a bargain." Bill shook his head. "There are lots of points about being old. That's the time the mind sets out on its travels. My dear old mother rockets over the seventy years of her life almost every day."

"I don't want a long run, but I want a full one. I should simply hate to peter out. Anti-climax—I couldn't stand that."

"I should call that rude to my old mother, if you'd ever happened to know the dear old thing." Bill took up a pen, and began to copy the series of hieroglyphics known to Rowly as "notes." "She isn't petering at all, but she isn't hurrying, either. She's going by the

smallest of semi-fifteenth inches, and I'm hanging on to her petticoat all the time. She's walking in the evening of her life, and plucking flowers that have been sweet for seventy years. I wouldn't miss being old, on any account. That's why I'm taking such care of myself now—not hurrying, like you and Rowly. I want to be able to insist what a much nicer world it was when I was young. I want to preach to folks who have moved with the times, and left me dreaming behind. I want to drowse in chimney-corners and on sunny lawns, and mix the generations, and call all the servants by the same name. I want to be part of an old chair in the gloaming, living over the thrills I couldn't quite grasp at the time, like the lift over a big fence or the first time I kissed my wife."

He met the question in the other's eyes with a smile and a shake of the head.

"Haven't I told you I don't hurry? You see, there's my dear old mother. She needs my hand to hold, while she's picking her evening flowers. Time enough, when she lets it go, to hold it out to somebody else."

He addressed an envelope and fastened it down.

"That's the boot-boy safely off Rowly's mind! Fortunately, we don't often have to bother with this sort of thing. Rowly's servants don't know *how* to leave, as a rule. They stay for ever and ever, and expect to have places found for their descendants. Of course, he ruins them for anybody else. It's the same with the tenants, too; they're all thoroughly spoiled. They think no end of him, certainly, as we all do, though he doesn't know it. He hasn't much opinion of himself, as no doubt you've already found."

"Surely you can't expect me to credit adoration from Crane? He's a good servant, I suppose, but

obviously very much of a machine. He took a dislike to me, I think, from the moment I arrived, so perhaps I'm prejudiced against the man." He smiled, and made a little, foreign gesture with his hands. "I suppose I do look as though I had no real business here!"

"A good many of your looks have had business here and to spare. It's rather wonderful, isn't it, how the type survives? I should think you'd feel rather proud. I like family legends, myself—they lengthen one's sense of life; make one feel as if one had lived the other men's lives as well. I'm glad it's an old world. One seems to get so much more."

"More than one wants, perhaps," Luis mused. "I think, on the whole, I should prefer to stand alone. Heritage of any kind means responsibility for another's doings; problems to which the dead alone hold the key. Direct ancestors are an unsafe possession—dangerous, sometimes. I can imagine, for instance, that, if one was ill and played out, one's individual self rather low, one's mind an envelope imperfectly filled, some restless family spirit might possibly take hold. . . ." He stopped, remembering the invading horror of the night before. "I'm rather in the dark about the family, to tell the truth. I know how the Spanish element is supposed to have arrived, but that's about all. Rowly hinted that it doesn't settle as it should."

"It's 'betwixt and betune,' after a manner of speech. The Spanish Huddlestons care for the place all right, but they don't seem able to stay true. It's almost as if they weren't allowed, however much they tried; as if some power, greater than themselves, were bent upon driving them out."

"Well, I shall not be here long enough to prove any of that, and as I haven't had a chance of learning to care, I can't be called faithless, as yet. What are the preliminary symptoms, by the way?" He exclaimed as Bill moved and stood up, making ready to go. "Surely you don't mean to desert me so soon? I was counting on you stopping to lunch."

"There are one or two people I must see before Rowly gets back; otherwise, I'd have stayed like a shot. I'm hoping to see you at Fallowfield as soon as you feel inclined. Of course, lots of people will be looking you up."

"I'm afraid I'd just as soon they left me alone! You see, I'm hoping to be gone, in a few months' time. At least I'm praying that such may be the case."

"There's a saying that Spanish Huddleston prayers are always answered too late," Bill laughed, moving to the door, "because they never give the Lord a chance of catching up with their mood. There's another that says—'Pray hardest when the wind is from the west!' I hope you'll soon be feeling quite fit."

CHAPTER IV

THE long, bright day idled interminably to its tryst with night. Luis ate his lonely meals in the silent room, staring listlessly at the quiet world without. Sometimes a gardener moved across a lawn, or the Cocker trotted through the scene, busy on his own pursuits ; sometimes a shorthorn sauntered down the park ; but about each of them was something unmeaning and unreal, with all the flatness of a moving picture flung upon a screen. No personal appeal came to him as he looked ; upon no chord in his soul did the land lay its intimate touch.

Crane served him with a perfection of ease which seemed to conjure dishes by the wave of a hand. He made no attempt to break upon the visitor's thoughts—was, indeed, almost corporeally elsewhere—yet Luis was glad to have him actually out of sight. Morbidly acute in his present state of health, he told himself that he was watched, that behind the man's cold eyes something glared at him in stealth, and in the silence he seemed to hear an inarticulate voice stammering a nervous hate. He felt it to be unjust, courteous and considerate as he was to all servants, though to-day he was not quite sure of even so small a virtue as that. There was about him a desolation which he had never hitherto known, and for which he could trace no adequate cause ; a sense of having wandered into a wilderness where his lower nature bristled and crouched, and

bared its fangs with a snarl. The world, grown empty about him, had left him not even the old self that he knew.

He strolled through the grounds and round the house, to the stables and the garage and the kitchen-garden, and was met everywhere by a look of sharp interest and quick reserve, and knew that he left staring eyes behind. The Cocker saw him from afar, and came tearing to meet him, only to halt at a dozen yards, with feather-tail drooped and puzzled, inquiring gaze. Eventually he went back to the house, and let the passionless hours drift over his tired head. In the young autumn stillness he sat looking towards the woods, watching the mist possess them before the dusk, and felt the double shroud rise to his own lips.

Rowly returned as hurriedly as he had left, conveying the impression that at just such a pace he had careered throughout the day. He had barely settled into his chair before the schoolmaster arrived, and after dinner he had to go out, once more, so that it was only at the meal itself he saw anything of his guest.

"Hope you've rested, and that you've not been altogether too bored? That new novel, now—I fancy it's quite good; not that I've had time to read it myself. Perhaps you felt able to take a look round? The weather's doing wonderfully well. One of these days you might have a peep at the farm. It's quite worth seeing—the old home and all that. The boys were always in and out, when they were here. They thought a lot of Johnny Ewbank and his father before him. I met Dick Garnett of Roselands, sticking with his new car, and he made me promise to run you over, to-morrow, always supposing you felt well enough to go. I've a

Governors' meeting at the Grammar School, in the morning, but that won't take long. You'll like the Garnetts, I think. Dick's one of my oldest friends, and Lettice is—one of my old friends, too. An interesting woman, clever and all that. Does any amount for the county; far more than it has any idea. Of course, she's a lot of character—so much character that, when you're working with her, you don't always know whether it's her character or yours. There's just one girl—quite charming; the sort that doesn't mind you being a bit of an ass. I suppose Faussett turned up?"

"Quite soon after you left. We had something of a talk. He seems a cheerful soul, with a mother of whom he had a good deal to say."

"There are only the two of them, you see, and she's quite a sweet old dear. The father was killed, out hunting, but they never talk as though he were really dead. Very cheering, of course, to believe jolly things like that. I should like to think that somebody looked for me when I was gone, saw me in my old place at meetings, and on platforms, and all that. Perhaps it would keep one from drifting too far."

He paused, and a lost look came into his face. When Crane poured his wine, he turned with a start, so that between them a trickle of warm red stole down to the cloth. "Probably Bill will be at Roselands to-morrow, as well. He and Julian have always been much together, and I've sometimes thought . . . well, well, it's no affair of mine. I hope you'll like the lot of them, I'm sure."

But, when the morning came, Luis, after a sleepless night, was in no mood either for luncheon-parties or to inflict himself upon a lady who, no matter what her

predilection for asses, might reasonably be supposed to object to bears. Rowly was very anxious and distressed, torn between his attentions to his brother and all the other claims upon his time. He hurried from pillar to post, sending messages to the washer-woman and the cook, interviewing a groom and a gardener and a man selling Persian rugs, answering shooting invitations, stamping insurance-cards and jotting down notes. When the car came round, he had to be dragged away from a caller who wished him to start a rifle-range in the park, and as he set his foot on the step, somebody arrived to borrow plants; but they got him off at last. It seemed to Luis, smiling a sardonic smile, that his stay at Thorns would be chiefly spent in speeding Rowly from his own front door.

From his bedroom window he had seen the harvesters at work upon the last field of grain, and after a while he strolled slowly across the park to the farm. He went in through the big arch in the moss-grown wall, and found the yard empty, the shippons quiet, and no more sign of life about the house than in the worn date-stone over the door. But, as he passed through the clipping-pens to the fields, he heard a woman's voice singing, somewhere at the back, coming out of clear spaces and cool, washed walls, vibrant in the stillness which the years had stored.

Thorns did not carry much corn, being a sheep-farm, but there was a crop or two of oats on the lower land, and here Ewbank and his lads were busy, snatching at the royal weather come in the nick of time. Johnny himself was driving the three-horsed reaper and binder, a wiry little man set in the swaying seat of the big machine. The slender sheaves came tossing along the yellow earth, where horses and men alike were black

against the leaning sea of gold, lapping the rough foot of the heather-garmented fell.

For some time Luis watched from the gate, the song of the knives lulling him to an apathy from which he roused with a start, in a spasm of fear and revolt breaking the spell woven about him by the rigid hills. In something like panic he flung off his coat, and went to help the men setting the hattocks into stooks. Johnny lifted a finger as he passed, watching him from time to time with still, reflective eyes. The Huddlestons had often worked in the fields, from the sheer joy of handling their own earth. The two who had just died had seen many a harvest through, cheerful souls, at home with the country and at ease with the men; but this was a stranger in the land. The lads answered him when he spoke, but for the most part kept their tongues still and their eyes away, as if prompted by some sealing oath. He shaped well enough, Johnny thought, but he was over smart by a deal. It was steady as did it, on the fells, pegging away the same gait all through, but the Spanish Huddlestons had always been hard to hold. This latest of them, with his supple figure and nervous grace, would not last half the day.

Less than half, indeed, for by dinner-time Luis was done, and, as he walked back to the farm, saw it swim and blur before his aching eyes. Johnny coaxed him within doors, where a separate meal had been set for the expected guest.

"They'll not be looking for you at your place, yet, and you'll likely be wanting your dinner, by now. The missis'll be put about if you make off without a bite, and I reckon her cooking's as good as Mrs Steele's. One of the lads can slip across with a word. Beg pardon,

sir, but they tell me you haven't been so well. Happen it'd be best if you knocked off."

So Luis ate his solitary meal, unburdened for once by the presence of Crane. The panelled houseplace was darkly bright with the shimmer of its own oil-polished face, and golden with the sun, cloven by the cool mullions into slanting shafts. Mrs Ewbank passed in and out, courteous hostess, honoured tenant and wise matron, in one. It was as the last, indomitable and assured, that she pointed him to the sofa to rest, and he submitted, after protest, watching in silence while she cleared away. Presently she brought him a cup of tea, which he drank obediently, listening to the distant kitchen sounds. The morning's toil had not relaxed his tautened nerves. He thought of them as a thousand imps in his aching brain, shrieking discord and hate. When somebody out of sight dropped a pan on the ringing flags, they arose and clutched each other by the hair, gibbering aloud.

The old house oppressed him as the newer had done, but with all the added weight of greater age. So many had lived here, so many had died ; yet all that remained of them was that which made the atmosphere therein, neither personality nor being, but a distilled essence and spirit. To that final merging he, in his own hour and place, would also come. It seemed to him the last and farthest death that of his passionate ego nothing should remain, while the common traits of kin went ever on.

He looked out to the orchard, his eyes resting on the apple-trees and the little vistas of field and fell framed by their drooping boughs. There were roses in the borders by the house, warm, scented, wonderfully-folded, velvet hearts. Beyond the orchard, in their

netted run, were Mrs Ewbank's hens. He could see the flash of white and ebony feathers, as the sun marked each stately turn. And always above the orchard-trees the rugged or smooth tops thrust themselves into the high, clear sky.

To the left of the low, broad room was the dining-hall of the old yeoman days, rising to the full height of the house. It was pleasantly cool to-day, with its flagged floor and blue-washed walls; and little breezes came in through its open doors, and from the kitchen and the dairy and the back porch. The clink of china and the intermittent waves of speech died away after a while, and only a hidden cat announced itself to his ear, together with the swing of the tall clock by the wall. His body rested in spite of him, glad for the moment to have been taken in hand, and his eyes soothed themselves to peace on the narrow lights, shuttered from without by the curving lines of fruit. Soon he was honestly asleep, and his tyrant, peeping in, nodded a sage head, and tiptoed into space.

When he awoke, he woke fiercely, instantly and violently alive, because the silence in which he slept had roused him as with a blow. The whole house lay still, as if utterly empty, so that none but himself lived and breathed within its ancient walls. The very cat had sunk into a sleep too deep for comfortable comment. Even the stairs, which, in the night, maintained a ghostly fusillade, offered no single volley to the marring of the afternoon peace. Only one thing moved and spoke, mocking the drowsy world, pointing the terrible quiet,—the tall clock by the wall. To his strained mind it seemed the passing-bell of the dales, the tally-keeper of the years. In its hasteless, human note was the passionless summary of country life—"As it is now, so it

was in the past, and in the future shall be still the same."

He sprang to his feet, groping before him, gasping for breath as his heart hammered and thudded and leaped and sank. He had dreamed that he was drowned, and buried in a grave, in the new grave where the new young rose-bush bloomed, and where no hand, however willed, might lift itself to its old use. The horror that was not of himself fastened again upon his life, wrapping itself about his throat, shaking him from head to foot. And then he saw a girl pass beneath the bending apple-boughs.

She was tall and very slender, very fair and very pale. Even the gold of her hair was pale, like the delicate sun-patch which creeps upon a wall just before sunset on a sunless winter's day. She moved swiftly and lightly across the arched stone frame, a swaying lily above the late roses and between the netted green, and then he heard her clear voice speaking at the kitchen door.

There was an Object, it seemed, for which Mrs Ewbank had promised a stitch or two in her spare time. The Chief Prosecutrix of the Object had forwarded some flannel, and—"What do you say to a row of feather-stitching down the front? Mother likes everything very neat and plain, but I don't see why even a bed-jacket shouldn't have its charms. I studied the subject when I had influenza, last year. I remember a knot of pink ribbon which helped me to eat my dinner, every day."

He heard both women laugh—one of them very light and sweet—and again he thought of sunshine on a darkening wall. It was years since he had spent the winter in England—he had almost forgotten what it was like ;

but, as a youngster, idling in the dusk, he had seen the golden flicker grow and gleam and fade, and had felt the wistful friendliness of its appeal. Coming after that moment of reflected hell, the memory reached him with a faint delicious charm.

The visitor refused to come in.

"You're busy with harvest, aren't you?—and they're waiting for me at the Hall. Mr Huddleston lunched with us to-day, and we expected the Spanish brother, too, but I hear he is ill. Of course, I could have sent the flannel by Mr Bill, but there was the feather-stitching, you know,"—she laughed again,—“and I wanted to see you myself. I'll come again at a more convenient time.”

She said good-bye and started away, but did not get far, Mrs Ewbank holding her in check. She dropped her voice, so that the words did not run clear, but Luis gathered that she was offering the Spanish brother as escort to the Hall. He laughed and frowned, and moved away, but not before he caught the girl's reply.

"Oh, please, I can't allow him to be disturbed! Really, I much prefer to go alone. He can't care about meeting strangers, or he would have come to Roselands to-day. I shall never forgive you if you drag him out.”

The words were simple enough, but, with his nerves catching at every shade, he heard the subtle alteration in her tone. She did not wish to see him, it said. He could see her, though, turned away, with her head averted and bent, and it came to him, with the certainty of truth, that the thing behind the change in her voice was the same which had spoken from other people's eyes.

Mrs Ewbank, out of range, said something which he could not hear, and he saw the girl nod her head.

"No, no, I know. It's only just at first. . . . Mr

Huddleston wishes it, so of course we must, and in any case it's not for us to decide. . . . Mother says it's nonsense, and I don't believe it myself . . . only now and then, at night . . . one's always silly, at night . . ."

Luis moved a second time, annoyed and ashamed, but almost immediately the conversation stopped, and was followed by a step along the path. Once again she came into the mullioned frame, slim and swift and golden and pale, and faded again between the bending apple-boughs.

He turned to find Mrs Ewbank smiling at the door, with a small boy clinging to her skirts.

"So you're up and about, sir, and I hope feeling a bit more like? You've had a nice sleep, nigh on an hour, and as sound as a bell! I thought I'd look in to see if you were stirring, by now. Yon was Miss Julian, outside—Miss Garnett, I should say. there's no more than the one girl. She's always that pleasant and ready for a bit of a crack. She and Mr Bill—Mr Faussett, that is—are about together a deal, and very kind. I reckon we'll have some rare grand news before long!" She smiled happily, with an air of sharing in the great event. "But you'll not be up in the news yet, sir, and happen not that keen to be bothered with such-like talk. This here's my little lad, as'll happen be your tenant, some day, with a bit of luck."

Luis looked at the child, already fashioning for the waiting groove, shaped for it, so it seemed, long since, by custom and descent. Already he had the look and build of those framed for the service of the land. Luis saw a life in leading-strings from the start, and was filled with vicarious revolt.

"It's a big world," he said gravely, bending to the upturned face, "and there are plenty of big things for

a man to choose. There's a sword and a gun for some, a pen, or a knife, or a box of bricks ; perhaps a boat, with funnels or sails. Don't you want them—any of them ?—or is it far too late, with your little clogs already on the treadmill of the soil ? ”

The boy looked up at him, puzzled, with a doubtful smile ; then down again, as if drawn by hidden treasure, to his small, clenched hand. The fingers opened slowly, with a kind of reserved, deliberate pride. Within, was a tiny, toy lamb, with stiff little legs and staring eyes, a solemn, white face, and a stiff little woollen fleece. When Mrs Ewbank saw it, she flushed a deep, embarrassed red, looking from the lamb to the stranger's face. Then she laughed quickly, closing her firm hand over the little one and its toy.

“ He's only a barn, Mr Huddleston, and he doesn't understand. Just as well he shouldn't, too—trying to put him off with such-like talk ! A farmer's lads are his brass ; everybody knows that. You should think shame to be robbing a poor man behind his back ! ”

CHAPTER V

ROWLY came hurrying up the park to meet him. He was very solicitous, very concerned, very inquisitive, and extremely irritating. Julian had informed him that the Spanish brother was resting at the farm after his harvesting orgy of the morning, and he had rushed up to make sure that all was well. In his heart he was rather amazed, perhaps even slightly shocked, that this magnificent personage should so condescend. He had often done that sort of thing himself, but it did not matter, for him. He was not a rising young diplomatist of gifts, with an ambassadorial background at Madrid.

"Surely a bit venturesome, my dear fellow, not to say altogether rash, with all the things you told me about gone wrong? Of course, you know best what treatment they prefer, but surely you ought to give them a chance—time to simmer down and rearrange themselves, and all that? I should have thought a quiet luncheon-party would have done you less harm, on the whole; not that I'm attempting to dictate to you, so please don't think anything of the sort. I couldn't imagine where you'd made off to; you seemed to be settling so nicely when I left. Touch of fever, perhaps—what do you say yourself? I wish you'd let me send for Myre, just to ease our minds. If you don't want him to try your temperature, he can take mine. The Huddlestons nearly always have a temperature, so they say. The Garnetts were very sorry to miss you, by the way; sent

you all sorts of jolly messages, and Dick's coming over to call on you soon. You didn't see Julian, by any chance, when you were up at the farm? She's quite looking forward to meeting you—interesting foreign atmosphere and all that. Of course, we're all immensely glad to see you, and I want you to do exactly as you please, but really, my dear fellow, I think you should make a determined effort to keep quiet."

No effort was needed, as it happened, for Luis was ill for some time after his escapade, and, caged by a prison within a prison, ate his heart out in his wide, green room. While his body lay obedient and inert, his mind fretted and strove through the long, smooth days and the oppressively still nights, each of which seemed to drive him farther into the wilderness where he had strayed. The perfect mechanism of the house, effortless and oiled, had for him something of the balanced motion of a wheeled bier. At times, indeed, the green room was a deep pool, from which he looked upward to a faintly-changing sky. He lay in the emerald translucence as in the heart of a gem, and saw the surface flicker and ripple, but make no answering stir below. On these days, not even Rowly, rushing across it like a darting trout, could rouse him to a consciousness of life; but, as his physical part strengthened, the spirit of him fought for escape, and with clamour and terror beat itself against the round wall of the smooth, uncarving heaven.

Yet he was a good patient; Crane saw to that—Crane, who nursed him with a passionless devotion, marred always by that hint of antipathy without form or cause. The delicate creations of the cook came through his hands as sacraments not to be spurned, backed by the moral force of strict routine. He had a

way, too, of employing the absent Rowland as a lever, with a success that would certainly not have attended that gentleman in the flesh. "The master's love, sir, and the new tonic," he would announce, in his hushed voice that could carry through babel. (Testified by a certain shooting-crowd, well into the port, the night that news had come of Mr John's death.) Or, again—"The master, sir, wishes to know if you are sound asleep? He's a hard day before him to-morrow, but we can't persuade him to bed until he's sure you've settled nicely for the night. I should be glad, sir, if you could oblige, as he's fairly wearied out."

The young footman assisted him, at times, but he was of little use, and obviously ill at ease. Luis had placed him as the pale pryer of the first evening, and was impatient with his lowered eyes and tightly-pinched mouth, suggesting some secret fretting to escape. Indeed, both men set the patient on edge; and though he mended physically, his mental distress was slow to yield.

Bill came often to see him, cheerfully idle and gracefully fluent, and one day he brought Dick Garnett. Luis was asleep when they arrived, and awoke to find the big man already by his bed, so that he never knew with what look the slow, meditative eyes had rested on him first. Perhaps because of this, since he had already grown to shrink from the primary moment of contact, he took a liking to his quiet visitor, whose long silences were as soothing as the faint wash of a neap tide. Mrs Garnett had sent a message, and an early flowering of the bronze chrysanthemums for which their houses were famous. When Rowly saw the flowers, carried in by Crane in a long, frosted glass, the little, worried frown deepened between his eyes.

" Yes, yes, I knew there was something wrong, something missing in the look of the room. Really, Crane, we ought to have thought of them for ourselves ! Jolly little things like that make all the difference when you're ill, and goodness knows we've any amount of stuff eating its head off outside. Nothing quite so nice as these, of course—I wasn't meaning to say that ; still, we've a few things, here and there. The Lady of the House would have remembered, you know ; that's where we fall so short. But Lettice always does the right thing—there's no doubt about that. She's always putting me to shame, and making me feel I'm no earthly use. My best thanks, Dick, and say I'll run across with those details of the Cottage Homes she was asking for, last week."

He moved to the side-table, where Crane had placed the springing mass of bloom, and ran his fingers lightly along the curved petals. He bent gently over the blossoms, seeming to register on every sense their colour and vitality, faint, clean fragrance and cool, delicate touch. It was almost as if he were trying to gather an impression that should remain as vivid and actual as the flowers themselves.

" She's thirsting for information," Garnett said, in the muffled tones that could with difficulty be traced to his motionless lips. " No good asking me, of course. I never know. And there's some latest thing in committees she's anxious you shouldn't miss. Can't think how you and she keep it up. I always sleep."

" Necessary machinery and all that," Rowly replied, rather absently, still standing before the flowers, " but it's a pity they have to drag on so long. People want to say things, you know, and you can't exactly nip them in the bud. There's always a sporting chance that

they may talk sense, one of these days, and it doesn't do to miss a possibility like that. October, isn't it, just about now? And next October there will still be chrysanthemums, I suppose. Queer, isn't it, how little we value things, if we know they're certain to turn up again, next year? There was an Italian count, somewhere, who was told he would die in the time of the lilies; he must have felt something that way, too. You know all about it, Faussett, of course; you read these jolly old things. I suppose we all die in the time of some flower, if it comes to that, but I never thought of it before. I only hope the time of snowdrops won't be mine, that's all. There's such a lot going on, just about then—birds nesting, and trees budding, and ploughing competitions, and all that. One simply couldn't drop out of things, just then."

Garnett rose slowly, muttering indistinguishable good-byes, and, with a friendly nod to the invalid, caught Rowly by the arm, and lumbered with him out of the room. Bill sat on, however, busy with a puzzle which Rowly had chased through half the shops in Witham for the amusement of his brother. A bell rang faintly at the back of the house.

"Another of Rowly's callers, I expect," Bill said, rolling a coloured bead into King George's crown. "Now I wonder whether that's the Church Magazine, or the Horticultural Society, or the Boy Scouts? I hope Dick's got Rowly safely hidden away, and is suppressing his sense of duty with a firm hand. It takes a lot of keeping down."

"Overgrown, I should say," Luis murmured, from his bed. "A beanstalk, which he is always trying to scale." There was a hint of a sneer in his languid tone, and Bill looked up from his beads, and then back.

"Oh, he was always a bit of a goer," he said absently. "Of course, he does far more than he ought, but if you don't do more than you should, and fret yourself more than you need, it's strange how often you end by simply doing nothing at all. Ney, by the way, would say I'm describing myself. You won't know him, of course. He's a sort of cousin-uncle of mine; grubs under cars. Now Rowly's always ahead of his job, giving twice as much as most in time and money and work. All sorts of people come to him for help; cash, of course—oh, yes—but advice, as well, and it's that which tells upon him most. Fortunately, he's pretty strong, though he had a bad illness, a year or two ago, and Myre nearly let him die, out of sheer exasperation. He was for ever jumping out of bed to hunt for papers or to see the grass grow. But I'm not sure that, on the whole, you're not worse. You don't do that sort of thing, I know. You lie still and look like a saint, and take what's given you, without a word, but inside you're all rage and ravening revolt. Rowly's a lighted taper, leaping and flickering in every wind, but you're a still flame, feeding on yourself."

"I don't quite know why I'm taking things so hard, but I suppose I'm rather homesick for Spain. You see, I know the country very well. Long before I got into diplomatic harness, I had made it practically my own. On the southern coast, just now, the sea will be blue-green, and the peach-orchards all of them yellow-ripe. The early-cut vines will be full of yellow grapes—look here, don't let me drivel like this."

"I suppose you'd a good time in Madrid?"

"Oh, yes. One does, you know, but it isn't only that. There's romance about an embassy, even in these days, something reminiscent of blown trumpets and cloth of

gold. And one is near the hub of the wheel—one imagines so, at least. And you can get on, if you care, and with the right man at your back. I do care. I want to go ahead, and Horne seems to think . . .” There was a letter from Spain on the table at his side, and he took it up, holding it for a moment before he laid it down. “Forgive me. The trumpets are fairly obvious, I’m afraid!”

“Well, you’ll be on your feet again before long. You haven’t lost very much. Why not try to take it easy for a while?”

“I do try, but at present it’s beyond my power. I feel harried and hounded out of the world I knew. It’s almost as if I might never be going back.”

Bill went to the window, and flung it wider than before. To the cheek of the fell the sun stooped and lifted and stooped again, like a shy lover. On a high cross-trod a sheep went stately, yet without purpose. It seemed as if it might march like that to the very end of the world.

“If it were your fate to remain?” he asked, keeping his back turned.

“It is inconceivable.”

“Things happen. Suppose a whole new world waits for you, and you are running from it?”

“I shall continue to run. You said yourself that the Spanish Huddlestons never took root. You said they seemed to be driven out. Well, I don’t know that I feel anything of that—perhaps it’s too soon—but I know that I’m not really wanted here. Even Rowly, splendid as he is, makes me conscious of that, and so do you all, both you and Crane and . . . you and Crane. You’re very kind, but you don’t let me in—really, I don’t see why! After all, I’m not making any sort of

a claim. I'm quite independent of anything here. Rowly may live to be a hundred, and nobody will be more glad—or, if we are speaking the bare truth, shall I say more unconcerned?—than I."

Bill came back with a face full of distress.

"My dear fellow, what on earth have we done? I'm ever so sorry if we've seemed remiss. It must be the brutal manner of the north. Crane's a bit of a stalactite, perhaps, but nobody minds that. As for myself, I'd begun to hope we were going to be friends."

The eyes of the two men met, probing each shuttered mind. Luis was silent, baffled, yet unconvinced. There was no reaching yet the thing that lay beyond.

"I'm an ingrate," he said, at last, apparently yielding the point. "I've been too fortunate all along. At the first check I fall foul of everybody round, including my guiding Fate."

"You're pushing her," Bill said, "and in consequence she's annoyed. No lady likes being pushed. I allow mine to have her own way, and so we get on like smoke, but you're pushing yours all the time, and now she's forgotten she's a lady, and has started pushing back."

"*Vaya!* Wait until you've been tried yourself!" Luis retorted, with a more cheerful laugh. "You, too, may be an exile and a stray, flung out of all you've known into a life you can't stand, away from your garden and your horses and your closest friends, away from your dear old mother by the longest road of all. Would you go, even then, like a humble, driven dog?"

Bill looked thoughtful.

"Not driven," he said, at last, "but like a nice, kind dog, too believing to disobey. And I shall never really lose my dear old mother. I shall always find her walking in the evening of my life."

Down in the hall he met Crane, and had a few words with him, to which the latter's tongue made respectful assent, though obstinacy dwelt in his veiled eye.

"You're almost perfect, Crane, but not quite. For the matter of that, I believe I was caught out myself. I'm not sure about Mr Garnett; on second thoughts, perhaps not. It's Mr Huddleston's wish, and there's not much we can do for him, after all. A little more artistry, Crane—just a little more. And tell Arthur not to behave like a cat on hot bricks. There's nobody to blame, you know, and it's possible that we're all hopelessly, idiotically wrong. Please God that it's true we are!"

CHAPTER VI

By the time he was downstairs again, the bracken was red on the hills, and the park was the court of a hundred kings, clothed upon with copper and gold, their feet set on a crimson floor, where the weaving of the autumn carpet was begun. He sat through the silent days in the big, quiet rooms, or dragged himself out into the still garden, where each last, brilliant effort of Nature emphasised the sinking to sleep that was to come. He was quit of the green pool, indeed; the prison within a prison had unlatched its doors, yet always the round, blue distance held him safe. He was still a captive, still cut off, and even letters from Spain broke their links before they were well joined.

He had nothing to fear, now, from the faces about the house. The women no longer peered from the stairs. Crane had at last poured himself whole into his rigid mould, while Arthur, grown suddenly at ease over a dropped dish, had become the visitor's joyful shadow and over-anxious friend. The outdoor servants were ready with greetings and even smiles, and with some he soon fell into a habit of talk. Only the Cocker still kept aloof, sitting apart with wistful eyes that would have been friendly, had they dared, as if some law were laid upon him by which his affectionate heart was torn in twain.

He began to know Rowly's friends of all grades, chiefly, at present, by name, and by little thumb-nail

sketches disconnectedly evolved. He had met Mrs Garnett, by now, and had sustained an intelligent conversation upon the use of Swedish drill in village schools. He found her compelling, as Rowly had said, with her concentrated gaze and arbitrary certainty of movement and speech; charming, too, with her still youthful figure and delicate face. He was amused by her, even while he chafed, contrasting each flowing phrase with the rare and soothing mutterings of Dick. The latter was often at the house, ready to walk or sit silent, as he was required, but as yet Luis had seen nothing more of the girl who had gleamed like a pale sun through the winter of his discontent, and whose voice had spurned him with the faintest of changed tones.

He got, at last, as far as the market-town, on one of the Saturdays marking the culminating point of Rowly's hurrying, over-crowded week. It was November now, and the giants of the country were fast shedding their robes of state, showing the clean limbs of wrestlers getting ready for their winter bout with the winds. From the empty fields, where the ley ploughing was brown by the dull gold of the cropped earth, the car rose by twisting climbs over billowing stretches of moor, and dropped again, winding still, to the town between the fells.

For Rowly, the miles were written across with the speech of his long thoughts. From plough to peat-moss, heathery fell, shelving hog-backs and clustered woods, his eye moved tenderly over the morning world. He might have created it, so Luis thought, watching his warm, possessive glance, and thereby hovering about a truth; for indeed we all create the land we love and which we look at with our eyes, since the soul

by which it breathes and speaks is drawn for each one of us from his own.

"First-class roads, don't you think? That's something we can do for you better than Spain. This used to be a famous corner for spills, but we had to have it taken off. People were always getting themselves killed, and writing to the papers to say they wouldn't have it. I was sorry myself, because it was an old landmark, but I suppose it's jollier to be a live motorist than a dead sacrifice to conservative taste. That's old Colonel Barton, crawling just ahead. I met him once in this narrow neck, taking the hill at a gallop with his coach. I have never forgotten how big the horses looked, or how he laughed as he scraped along my wheels. Now he's driving a bath-chair, and dreading a motor at every yard." He lifted his hat with a courteous wave to the old man nervously hugging the wall. "No four-in-hand for him nowadays, poor old chap!

"I've thought out many a problem along this road, puzzles, you know, that I'd got to settle at the other end. There was that question of margarine for the Tower Home—but of course you can't be expected to care about that. Then there was that day we had to tell old Frear he'd got too old for his job, and as chairman of committee the wording fell to me. I stopped the car, and tramped about until I'd got it fixed, and hanged if I didn't find I was crying, by the end! Poor old Winder thought I'd gone daft, and was making off back to Thorns for help, but I managed to find the words all right, and nobody was hurt. Indeed, later, when he died—old Frear, I mean, of course—his widow wrote me the jolliest letter I've ever had, saying he'd always counted me his friend. . . .

"You'll not mind my stopping for a word with Thomas Cragg? He's got his son home, ill, and I've some papers he might like. Green farms this land; a very jolly old soul. Starved his wife until she ran away to die, and wouldn't even pay his last respects unless the parson paid his fare. . . .

"I hope I'm not boring you, or giving you a fit of the blues? Sounds as if everybody I knew was buried, or just about framing that way. Fact is, when you get to my age, you live as much with the dead as the living, and scarcely know which is which. The world must have been terribly empty until the first man had died. They say the morning of creation must have been so jolly nice—everything so fresh and innocent and happy, and all that—but I can't help thinking that the last day will be jollier still, when every bit of earth has a name and a face, as well as somebody's love, not to speak of his bones. Seems as if it would be human itself, by then, and that nobody could have the heart to wipe it out. Hope I'm not talking altogether like an ass; Faussett could tell you what I mean. Of course, Bill and his dear old mother don't believe that anybody really dies. They say there isn't such a thing as a dead death; only various kinds of living ones, that's all."

So he chattered, his soul carried to and fro on the magic carpets of memory and the changing scene, and Luis listened and looked, wondering if he, too, should ever see the coloured threads of his days spun like a web across the surface of the land. Yet the drift of it all was death, he mused. Scarcely a speech of Rowly's but had its stop against that door which opens from one side alone. The intense sadness of the country, which is the secret of its dignity and strength, stooped

upon him from the sky, swirled upward from the stretching moor.

Entering Witham by a bridge over the Wythe, they climbed the steep, narrow street where carts and pigs in their crates obstructed the already difficult traffic. The old town was full of farmers and their wives and dogs, "quality" gossiping and shopping, and makers of other men's welfare hurrying to their wordy council-halls. Past the fish-market, narrowing the right-angle turns into the main street, they ploughed their way to the County Club, where Luis was to wait for Bill. There was nobody there, at that hour, and Rowly, after leading him upstairs, could not be persuaded to leave. Watch in hand, he chattered about the room, knocking on the window at imaginary Bills, plunging to the door to see if he was outside, full of apology, agitation, and distress. Luis got him away, at last, and watched him emerge below, to be carried on a wave of kindred souls into the shadow of the Town Hall.

He drew a quick breath of relief when he was at last alone, free of the need to argue and protest. There were times when Rowly irritated him to positive pain, the kindly, tiresome little man of limited outlook and scope, with an over-worked sense of necessity to his sphere. Yet in more than one heart he had made for himself a niche where respect went willingly on its knee, if sometimes with the hint of an affectionate smile on its mouth. The cleverer, more subtle brother gave a mental shrug. Affection he might achieve, even for a chatty little man whose mind ran in its own track like a hunted, lolloping hare, and whose chief amusement was be-silking a drawing-room in which he had no time to sit; but he was very far from bending the knee.

He stood for some time looking at the flow of country

life, and the market-folk gathered into groups. Even in the morning light he found it dull and drear, this gayest day of the week in the northern farmer's life. The little, entry-riddled town had the grayness of age, of rough weather, and the hard lives drawing to it from the dales. It was changing, indeed, though slowly. They had widened some of its narrow ways, glimpsing the shut-in life against the fell. It had its picture-house and its theatre, its libraries with the latest books. More than one garage was busy and full. The latest fashions went cheek by jowl with the wear of other years. Yet over all the sad little town hung the low, grey veil, stealing the colour from its cheek, drifting between it and the magic sun. Luis looked out on dark buildings and muddy streets, weather-beaten faces and drab clothes, and wondered that life could be so void of grace. Joy, such as this northern land could give, was indeed no more than a waning sunbeam on a darkened wall.

He saw Julian drive up in a yellow-wheeled cart, and set her mother at the same portal which had swallowed Rowly and his kind. Even if he had not known her, he could have guessed who she was, for Bill appeared instantly at her horse's head, struck into being by her presence in the street. When Mrs Garnett had gone, he moved to the wheel, and the two fair heads leaned each to each, in familiar comradeship of speech and smile. Luis smiled, too, with quickened interest and the farthest touch of envy; and the passers-by smiled, caught by the vision of graceful youth. No need, indeed, for Bill to hurry, he thought, recalling the latter's words at their first meeting. When the time came for him to lose his dear old mother, he would only have to reach out his hand. . . .

She moved on at last, very slowly, but Bill moved, too, still talking, and stealing her glance from the traffic to his own face. A lorry checked them as they reached the Club, and Faussett, looking up, saluted the lonely figure with a wave of the hand. Julian's eyes followed his, for the moment off their guard, and filled, on the instant, with resentment and dismay. Then Bill spoke—a few, quick, urgent words—and she dropped her gaze to the reins, the colour flowing into her cheek. A moment later she drove away, and he entered the Club alone.

He found Luis turning the pages of a magazine, apparently unperturbed, though there was a distinct pause before he looked up to encounter Faussett's greeting smile. It did not do to meet people's eyes too soon, he was telling himself, with a spark of amused but cynical pride. He must learn to give them time to get their feelings in hand, since the sight of him was so evident a shock. He was certain that the impression had been no figment of his own brain, no cloud cast by the gloom of his own mind. There was something, of which he had no knowledge, for which he was being held to account, not openly, but by subtle judgments, infinitely more wounding than accusation or rebuff. That stab from the girl's eyes had settled the point beyond dispute, but he had no intention of tracing the puzzle home. He had tried for an explanation once, and had been refused, and he was in no mind to try again. After all, it mattered little enough, on the whole. He would be quit of them all before so long, and the strange miasma of this phase would drop away, like a fog-bank left to sink below the uttermost edge of sea.

"That was Miss Garnett, I conclude, down below?"

He laid the paper aside as Bill sank into a chair. "I had a glimpse of her, one afternoon, at the farm."

"Julian? Yes. I forgot you hadn't met. She's always in, on a Saturday, doing imaginary shopping, but really, like the rest of us, bent upon seeing life. I meet her every ten minutes or so, and chat until I'm sent off again; *bonjour* at the Town Hall, *bienvenue* at the fishmonger's, and *bis, bis* in the shadow of Mr Carnegie. She never really succeeds in losing me. Mrs Garnett, of course, is at the Board, bullying the Little Brothers of the Poor. There's an election to-day—master and matron of Ireleth Workhouse—and she's running some protégés of her own. She'll get them in, too, unless something unexpected goes wrong. You see, she's Rowly at her back, as, of course, she always has. Did you know that he courted her, too, in the days when she was a Miss Warr of Patton? Perhaps it's impertinent of me to tell you, but then everybody knows. They always do, in the country, and it's no use getting upset. Our love-stories go to keep the flowers sweet. What suited her in Garnett I have never been able to decide, but perhaps it was because he kept her wondering about the things he might say, if he once made up his mind to start. Rowly talks too much, of course, but he cared; cares still, for the matter of that. She knows it, too, and puts on him no end. There's something merciless about her, sometimes, although she's so delicate and fine. She's like a pair of embroidery scissors, don't you think?—those sharp, little gilded toys that women use for silks. I sometimes feel as though she were snipping at the thread of Rowly's life."

"He seems greatly attached to her, and particularly fond of the girl. He often mentions her, quotes her as though I knew her like himself."

"Yes, they're great friends. Garnett's very good about sharing her, too. I suppose he would say it was a form of the *amende honorable*, if he was ever in the habit of saying anything at all. She's something of a buffer between Rowly and her mother—tries to prevent her from driving him too hard. He's her godfather, too, by the way. We do run in circles, don't we? At least it keeps us from falling off the edge of the world."

They went, after a while, through the little, twisting town, hung in tiers, as it were, against the side of the fell. Here and there they caught flashes from the river, a vignette of the sheer, stark moor to the east, a vista of blue hills to the north, and everywhere hints of the life behind the street, where the yards ran away, curved and climbed, narrowed, widened and narrowed again, darted and disappeared. But they saw nothing of Julian as they sauntered and talked, taking any turn that offered, and every path that called. Bill might know her haunts, as a rule, but she had contrived to hide herself to-day.

Having the warm side of the master of Thorns, he was stopped continually by one farmer or another, and lent a cheerful ear to necessity or grievance, while Luis stood by, or walked slowly on, conscious of turned heads and spoken observations as he passed. He was called up, once, to be introduced to a tall, old man, with a white fringe of whisker round his strong-hewn face, and wearing the black, soft hat and broad-skirted coat which some of the older generation still affect. Bill was speaking in a rapid undertone as Luis approached, and the dalesman nodded a slow assent, his clear, light eyes full of interest and recognition. Here, at least, was no critical dislike to dread, no touch of horror hastily suppressed.

"Ay, you're very like!" he observed, having offered a horny hand. "It took me aback a bit, seeing you in the street. Why, it might just ha' been Mr Gaspar himself! I thought a deal o' your grandfather, sir, as did more than most, for all he was always leading folk a dance, like a cat wi' a bunch o' crackers to her tail! He took to sailing as a kind o' cure, but I doubt the cure was the worse trouble o' the two! Many's the time I've heard him say if he could nobbut get himself drowned and come back again to life, he'd likely settle himself for good, but he never managed it out and out. I've heard tell he give his missis a mort o' trouble, though he didn't live over long. He wasn't a deal over fifty when he died. Happen you don't take after him, sir, though you're geily like—a Herdwick Huddleston, if ever there was one yet!"

Bill murmured something under his breath, and the old man cleverly veered the talk, almost without a break, but when the two had passed on, Luis reverted to his opening speech. Faussett, however, hadn't much to say.

"Sail? Oh, yes—didn't you ever hear? It got to be a sort of craze. He was always making off on foreign trips. One of his boats was quite famous—got into the books—no more than five tons, I think she was, but she did some wonderful runs. She was lost off Algiers—broke her moorings, and went down. I wonder you haven't heard of the *Alondra*, before now."

"My grandmother seldom talked of her married life. She can't have had much of a time, if what you say is true. All things considered, I wonder she ever took to me at all, but we were always the very best of friends."

"A hair of the dog—perhaps? You never know."

Bill began to lengthen his stride. "I'm glad you made it up to her a bit. There's Julian, waiting with the trap."

They were back at the Town Hall, by now, and the Guardians were hurrying away in twos and threes, with bent heads and the last flow of opinion upon their tongues. Mrs Garnett remained on the pavement with Rowly, the flush of victory upon her cheek. By some means not quite clear to the rest of the Board, her candidates had been run through with triumphant ease, and though they were in every way eligible and an excellent find, the meeting had a strange, defrauded sense of not having acted on its own volition. Now she was passing on to conquer other worlds, dragging Rowly at her chariot wheels.

"My dear Rowland, the thing is an absolute necessity, as I have seen for some time! At least do me the justice to admit that I never extort money from the public except in a thoroughly good cause. And I have my hands very full, as you know. - I should not be likely to suggest such a course, if I were not perfectly assured that it was urgently required. But the Home is certainly in need of support, and it seems to me that a bazaar next year is the correct thing to meet the case."

"Yes, yes! You always know." Rowly was all kind agreement, as usual, though obviously depressed. "Excellent inventions—bazaars; charming way of cheating—I mean meeting—one's friends; nothing I like better, myself. But I should think it awfully jolly if you could manage to leave me out. You see, I've my brother at home, just now—still a bit of an invalid, poor chap!—and I can't be always running away."

He looked relieved, so Luis imagined, when the latter approached. Julian was standing slightly apart,

frowning a little, as if at her thoughts. She started when Rowly touched her arm, speaking his brother's name, and in the glance she raised there was nothing but a preoccupied distress. Mrs Garnett gave him her hand, inquired charmingly after his health, and then sat down again, so to speak, before the walls.

"As chairman of the governors, Rowland, you are bound to figure in the affair. I hardly see how it could be otherwise, if it is to be a success. Your name has been connected with the place for so long that people have grown to associate them as a matter of course."

"Oh, my name is at your service—everybody's service," Rowly put in quickly, "and all the money I can lay hands on, too. But if I might be let off the meetings, you know, and seeing to the printing and the woodwork and the drapery, and all that? So many little troubles occur, don't they, and you've no idea how I take them to heart! Everybody's very jolly to me, of course; one would almost think that they really quite liked me, but the difficulty is that they don't always like each other."

Julian swung round, and broke into the discussion.

"Won't his name be enough, Mother, just for this once? He has far too many meetings, as it is, and you know they worry him so that he can't sleep. You don't really need him, either, if it comes to that. You can run a bazaar with anybody in the country, and we'll all help. It's really women's work, after all."

Lettice looked at her steadily, but without obvious rebuke.

"I do need him, my dear. You are certainly wrong in that. Rowland and I have worked together so long—I could scarcely contemplate such a large undertaking without his help. It dates back so far, you see—to

the days when we ran our little Workhouse treats, and were very foolish and young."

She smiled at Rowly, and he returned the look with one which was glad and tender and pathetically proud. Those had been very blissful days, when together they had handed round tobacco and tea, sung together on a shaky stage, or scrambled bravely through a screaming farce. He was the slave of those fair days still, when the rosy fetters at his heels had betrayed no hint of steel.

"He can't sleep!" Julian repeated brusquely, brushing aside these memories of the past. "He's doing too much, as everybody knows, and you ought to be the first to help him out. Be merciful, Mother dear, and let him off the bazaar."

"Of course, if he is *ill*, as you imply. . . ." Mrs Garnett's tone was delicately unbelieving, and inflexibly set. "But you are quite well, aren't you, Rowland? and there isn't the faintest need for haste. The affair cannot possibly come off until the beginning of June."

Rowly lifted his eyes to a baby airship of a cloud, drifting adventurously above the street.

"June!" he echoed, dreamily. "The month of love and roses and bazaars!" He laid his hand on Julian's shoulder, and patted it, and smiled. "I shan't mind, you know, as long as I see the snowdrops all right."

She winced, putting up her fingers for a moment with a quick touch.

"They never give you any peace!" she said passionately, with a hint of tears in her uneven voice. "Why can't they leave you alone to rest and be happy and quiet? It's a lucky world to have you in it at all, without asking anything more. There are so many things you could enjoy, but they never give you a

chance. Mother's the worst of them all—and now—and now. . . .”

The pressure of his hand must have stopped her, for she broke off, flinging a glance of appeal at each in turn, from her mother, coldly silent and surprised, to Bill, lightly tapping a cigarette, finally at Luis, half-amused by this storm in the round of a cup. The latter, however, was the only one who stirred to any sort of response.

“ Really, Mrs Garnett, I'm afraid he's over-booked. The cars seem to be in commission all day long, and he's the despair of Crane and the cook. I feel sure he ought to be spared this particular bazaar.”

But Rowly himself set this sudden collaboration aside. He had listened and obeyed too long. He said yes, as he had known he would say it, from the first—as more than one other present had known. Julian was silent as he put her into the trap.

The three men crossed the road to the garage, and found Winder waiting on the kerb. Bill had come in by train, by a carrier's cart, or a motor-cycle which had not survived the run—Luis was not quite sure which,—but he went back with them in the car. The invalid had had enough of the market atmosphere, by now, and for Rowly there were other duties calling him home. He was quite unusually silent on the quick run, leaning back rather wearily as they dropped at last from the moor, and saw the park at their feet; but, as they slowed for the gates, he sat up and opened the door.

“ That's the curate, isn't it, turning the corner on his bike? I'll catch him, don't you think, if I get out and run? I want to see him about those slides . . . no, no, Faussett, I'll do it myself. You might shout,

though, will you?—thanks, oh, thanks! Don't wait lunch. I'll meet you at tea."

He disappeared down the road, and the car went on to the house. Crane betrayed no surprise that the master was not to be seen. Luis felt his sympathy recede, annoyance taking its place. Rowly was altogether too spasmodic and absurd. Really, all things considered, he scarcely deserved a better luncheon than a sheaf of lantern slides!

CHAPTER VII

By the drawing-in of the year Luis was stronger and more content, though his nerves still warned him against excitement or strain ; but the wretchedness of the first bad days had yielded to a kinder mood, pierced at times by flashes of a feeling that was almost joy. True, the land was still no possession of his own, but there were days when it held majesty but not terror, mystery that hid no harm ; others, indeed, when it took on a mother-face to his distrustful eye, smiling and tender and invitingly sweet.

He drove and walked through the mildly wintering country, no longer loathing it, though still unrooted and strange. He was not well enough to shoot, but he went with the guns on Rowly's snatched days of sport, or lunched at other shoots with Rowly's friends, absorbing many an English picture by the way—stripped woods against an opal sky, deer moving through the hollows of a park, some silhouette upon an edge of hill ; sound-impressions, too, which stayed upon his ear, of laughter and whistle and ringing shout, the beating of sticks, the drum of wings, and the clean finality of sped shot.

He was often at the farm, soothing his brain with Johnny's simple wisdom and his wife's dry wit, becoming gradually aware of the order of things about the place, so that he knew when he was most welcome or least likely to intrude. Faussett, of course, was constantly

at the Hall, drifting in at all hours with his cheerful smile, his atmosphere of a happy secret aching to be told. Once past the door and his chat with Crane, he would arrive at the library by slow degrees, and from a deep chair would give Rowly the news of the neighbourhood, messages from his dear old mother, graphic sketches of his last run with the hounds; everything, in fact, but his earnest attention to the business of the day. Later, indeed, he would attack the work in hand, but always with a picnic air of having evolved a new and charming game. There were times when Luis wondered at Rowly's patience, though with his usual touch of contempt. It seemed as though he must find Bill as much a hindrance as a help; yet often, when the latter had gone, leaving no obvious achievement behind, there was a cheerier light in the other's face, where had been harassed lines for hours.

Luis himself came to his assistance, at times, finding the days still drag. He lacked, indeed, the knowledge of the country which cannot be taught, but must grow, by slow reachings of root and runner, into one's life, but he drew a sardonic amusement from acting as typist and clerk, smiling at himself as he tapped letters to agricultural societies, cricket clubs and Y.M.C.A.'s. Bill arrived one morning to find him drafting a notice for an invitation meeting in support of the S.P.C.C., and gave a little, dismal whistle of disgust.

"Oh, that? Yes, I suppose it must be just about time. I ought to have tried to prevent it somehow, but it seems to come round so fast. When did the blow fall?"

"Just as we finished breakfast. Mrs Garnett rang up to remind Rowly that the annual meeting was about due, and would he be kind enough, as usual, to hold it

here? Rowly was kind enough, as he always is, but he seemed distinctly put out."

"Yes, it is the one charitable act that he begrudges in the least, although he always insists upon carrying it through. The Mauve Room is a hobby of his, as I daresay you know, and it positively hurts him to have it damaged or upset. A mark on the carpet frets him like a personal insult or a stain on his own good name. I wish I could have managed to help him out."

"I made my own feeble attempt, but without success. You can't argue with a man whose mind is travelling down a wire. She gave him his instructions—date, hour, and whom to ask to lunch—and since then we've been busy transposing engagements in order to clear the line for the event. I couldn't ask her, of course, and I felt awkward about asking Rowly, but why can't she have the affair in her own house?"

"Dick won't allow it, that's why. Not that he has ever been known to say so, but the fact contrives to exist. She may do as she chooses outside, and she may pull all her strings from home, but he won't have any machinery about, so to speak. It's a curious situation, but in many ways she has more control over Rowly's household than she has over her own. Still, she might have spared him the meeting, I think, especially as she has nailed him for the Bazaar. She knows perfectly well what he feels about the Mauve Room. I suppose the trouble is that she's a woman without dreams, unless you except the sort that you meet with in prospectuses or works on hygiene in the home."

"I proposed the dining-room, the billiard-room, the conservatory, but none of them appeared to meet the case. It seems that the Mauve Room is part of the entertainment, and that the Lady of the House con-

siders it the only proper place. Last year it was pale-green, and somebody hid a sopping umbrella in the curtains, and upset a hot-water jug over the couch, but of course it was a most successful meeting, and equally of course everybody must come again."

Bill laughed.

"Poor old man! It's very hard. The exasperating thing about it is that the weather always behaves as badly as it knows how. He tried it in the summer, once, and there was a thunderstorm when the people were half-way here, and none of the walking ones had any cloaks. The room was rose-pink, that year, and some of it went away on the wet frocks. . . . I quite forgot Julian, by the way. There's a basset-meet at the bottom of the park, and we thought you might care for a run."

Luis looked at the document under his hand.

"What about the notices for this affair? I suppose they ought to be issued fairly soon?"

"Oh, there's plenty of time for those! Did you tell me the date, by any chance? All the Misses Browns and the Mrs Smiths are in that drawer, but we'll dig them out to-morrow or next week. Besides, now I come to think of it, this is really my work, not yours. You can't, in common courtesy, insist upon doing it, after that."

Luis yielded, shutting a blotter on the draft as Crane came in to replenish the fire.

"I wish you could have persuaded Rowly to come out. He has gone to frowst in a stuffy court-room for the moral benefit of somebody who steals hens. He seems to me to be in a very depressed frame of mind, and I can't help thinking that he's worse since I came. Half his conversation is directed towards his latter end."

Crane dropped the little poker with a brassy clink, causing Bill to start.

"My dear chap, he can't endure to see anything pursued! I expect he's being positively foolish at the court, if only we could take a look in. When he was first a magistrate, he did no end of absurd things, letting people off and paying fines all round. I'm not so sure he didn't offer to serve the sentences himself. It's distinct agony to him to think of any creature being hunted down."

Crane had finished stoking, and lifted his head until his eyes met Bill's, and then together they looked through the window facing the fell, where, along its misty, nebulous sides, the Spanish sheep were strung. A far-off plaint from them drifted into the room, the sound that was always about Thorns, both day and night.

They found Julian at the park-gates, in a pale-grey world where the black stems of the trees came up in procession and passed, and the undergrowth and the river took to themselves unfathomable fastnesses and depths. The air was very still, and along its infinitely caressing surface the music of the hunt rippled in bell-like waves of sound. They lighted upon hounds before long, and joined the little crowd of followers cutting their way across the wet fields to the bay. Then the sun reached its yellow fingers through the mist, and the colours leaped alive with an atmosphere of faint surprise; not as they do, in the South, with the vigorous rapture of youth, but with the gentle grudging of advancing age, from whose mellow, blent half-tones some mantle of retirement has but partially slipped away. Under their feet the deep, succulent turf yielded and sprang, and their throats were full of its heady scent and a far-off tang from the sea.

It was a day of pictures for the stranger in the land. On either side of him were eyes which looked and loved, and drew his own in their train, from green meadow to brown plough, rolling flat to curving hill, fine-etched plantation and climbing hedge, smoke-blue mountain and snow-furred cap. They had lunch at a beck-watcher's house, and afterwards, by sheer good luck, came upon the hunt once more. They were well towards the sea, by now, making to a fairy-thin planting of larch standing out on the marsh to the very edge of the sand. Down the long cleft of a glade they saw the pack flash across an aureole of light, their note edged and sharp in the bright air by the sea. Luis watched the dappled backs race through, the slim whips skimming in their train, but long after the chorus had sunk and freshened and finally died, he stood gazing at the strip of sky beyond. Something, it seemed, beckoned him from out there, where the water rippled that he could not see, urging his feet into the narrow passage of the tree-columned aisle; and when at last Faussett drew him away, he went with a cruel sense of having been torn from his rightful path. But, as the first soft curve rose between him and the sea, the longing left him as sharply as it had come. Not yet did he know what summoned him, nor had the hour struck for him to obey its call.

The world was all grey again when they came back to their own ground, and along a shadowy lane chased a far-off phantom that was Faussett's house. At times, through the high barrier glooming on their left, its topaz eyes gleamed and winked, while on the other hand the soaked fields sloped away in the slowly-yielding light. Against each dank hedge was set a white-grey fold of the mist, and the soft black trunks of the trees

rose rootless from its swathes. The land was all strange with mystic shapes of wall or faintly-figured fell, winding road, or blurred, low-arched bridge, half-hiding farm or crouching wraith of sheep. In every hedge-corner was a cavern of cloud from which the shadow-army drew, and with noiseless legions covered the earth. Over all was the waiting stillness of eve, the press of the tender, clinging air, and the sweet, deep, wholesome scent of English soil.

As such, for the first time, it took Luis in thrall, so that he stopped a moment in the hedge-side, leaving the others to pass ahead. For a while they went unheeding, and the wandering mist gathered them up, leaving only their voices to come back to him down the lane, mysterious, musical, and gay. He thought of them as one thinks of lovers in a fairy-tale, half ethereal and half human, with the mist-cloak of wonder over their shoulders and before their eyes. Across at the hide-and-seek farm, dim figures moved in the yard, bringing a sense of nearness and kin. A lantern, swung in the black mouth of a shippon, opened for him its pale-gold eye of cheer. Marvelling at himself, he could have laid his cheek to the wet earth in an intimate caress. He looked from tree to tree, from hedge to hedge, as a man looks who marks by each some happy adventure of the past, unfettering yet never forgot. All had for him, incomprehensibly, yet beyond dispute, the mystic associations of childhood and youth, and suddenly he laughed to himself, very softly, and with the finest fibre of his soul.

The two in front had paused and turned, looking for him around the dusky curves. Quite suddenly they separated, and it came to him, with a little shock of surprise, that Julian was coming back to him, alone.

At first he only heard her light tread on the soft, wet road ; then he saw her, duskily and faint, no more than a subtle emanation of wood and soil ; presently she was really coming and near, and suddenly it seemed as if the lantern across the way were swinging in his hand. . . .

" Bill has gone on to break us to his mother," she explained. " She will be delighted to see us, I know, but she likes to be prepared. I came back in case you did not know the way."

" I do not know any way to-night ! " he confessed, with the same amazed laugh. " Surely there is some sort of charming enchantment abroad ? Something happened, just about there. I had a sudden longing to be running over clover . . . lying under a hedge with pipe and smock, or leaping a five-barred gate, in a pink coat."

" Perhaps you have come across a dream-trap," Julian said. " We don't really see most of the things we look at, do you think ? But every now and again we get a glimpse of them whole, and then it's just as if the world had been made for us, that very moment, all new. It seems altogether too good to be true ; the colour and the shape and the general scheme . . . the— the *richness* of the power behind it all ! This is a wonder-ground, in any case. Bill and I know it so well, and all the Faussetts have loved this lane. Perhaps you are walking in our country of the mind."

" I suppose I can't be invited to stay ? " he asked lightly, but with a wistful touch. " I'm a little tired of camping in dear old Rowly's, sometimes. All the gates are labelled and lead into somebody's committee-room, and the farms are institutions of the most benevolent kind."

" Perhaps he gets tired of it, too," she said quietly,

and he was silent, remembering how often it was her mother's hand which led Rowly into that country of statistics and prose. There was no correction in her voice, but he felt that she drew away, and remembered her quick revulsion in the street. Yet they were good friends enough, by now, and were at ease again by the time they entered the Fallowfield drive, where, to the dark, verandahed house, the last of all the roses lined the way. Bill was at the door, with his mother on his arm, and the warm, low hall took the tired hunters in. Julian was plainly at home, to all intents a daughter of the house, and Luis thought again of the hand that Bill would some day reach; yet remembered, too, with a pleasant content, that she had come back to himself, alone.

They had tea in the lamp-lit parlour, with its long panes uncurtained to the dim lawn and the brown earth dusk-veiled and mist-sheeted beyond. The old lady would not shut out the dying day until of its own accord it drew its hand across her face, for over every sod and stone the happiness of her life was spread, like a royal garment upon some strong, sound, peasant son of the land, and in light or shadow alike some fold of it caught remembering eyes, and waked an echo in her heart. The sorrows and joys of the past had altered and merged until she scarcely knew them apart, since each, distilled by the fine hand of Time, had kept only that purest essence of beauty which belongs equally to both.

Luis was more tired than he knew, and he succumbed dreamily to the shifting play of light in the homely room, where over the old furniture shadow and flame held tourneys to the death, with thrust and parry crossing their steel and golden swords, slain in their

thousands at every stroke of the clock, yet always with fresh troops to set upon the field of war. The china tinkled and talked under the old lady's hands, her own unhasting monotony of speech like a tiny tune of three notes played and played upon an old spinet. When she laughed, it was with a delicious, etherealised chuckle, like the call of a far-off grouse. Her blue eyes were very still, and full of a wide, child-like content, as if she knew that all her sheaves were gathered past stealing into her feeble arm. Bill's face, for all its greater virility and humour, was very much the counterpart of her own. He, too, it seemed, with his tranquil mouth ungraven and stirred, moved in some magic circle across which no bitterness could reach. For neither mother nor son had there ever been that warfare of the mind which ravages the earth before the eyes. They had been in accord with Fate always, and their infinite acceptance had left them thus, beautiful instruments through which the winds of destiny might blow as they chose, raising no discord from the yielding strings.

Julian was very near them, Luis thought, watching the oval of her face melt and sharpen in the gold-threaded dusk. At Roselands he had sometimes found her aloof, at Thorns, nervous and constrained, but at Fallowfield she was all gentleness and grace. She, too, it seemed, moved on the plane of content where Bill and his mother pitched their happy camp, and between the three of them ran the daisy-linked chains of simple days, kindly thought, clean action, and good hope.

The little tune on the spinet played on.

"And so you had a happy time, my dears, and plenty to eat, I hope—not too much mud? I have always been very fond of the mosses myself; there was a farmhouse where they made such excellent cowslip wine.

I remember walking there with somebody's curate-in-charge; flounces it was, that year—four of them, rather deep. I remember he wished to hold my hand, and . . . ah, well, poor thing, he died, so I suppose he got over it all right. That was before I met Bill's father, and the hair was worn very low. He was trying a young horse when I saw him first, and it took exception to my blue silk parasol. I had to throw it over the hedge, and he climbed after it while I held the horse, and long after we were married, we kept it carefully put away. In the lane it was, just outside, and such a beautiful pink coat."

Luis looked at Julian, and she nodded.

"I said you were walking in our country of the mind. We always look for him in his pink coat, and round every corner we are perfectly certain he is there."

"It set him off so extremely well, and there were buttons that winked in the sun. I took occasion to admire it while he was climbing the hedge. It is always the first coat that counts. And the last. I cry sometimes when I think of both, but in a different way for each. He was buried in the last, and it had been torn by a briar, so I mended it for him before he went. I did not do it as well as I should have liked, but he smiled all the time as if it were perfectly right. I could not bear that he should not go away neat."

The night outside deepened, but no sense of sadness crept upon the room. There was no fear here of the outer dark into which all whom we love must pass. These half-fairy Faussetts saw life as a series of pictures—death, one of them, it seemed; between the two no heavy shroud or immovable wall, but merely the gossamer curtain of the mist. Round every corner, as Julian had said, some dear one waited, close at hand.

Luis drifted out into sleep, lying back in the worn oak chair which the man in the pink coat had always used. From afar he heard Mrs Faussett's voice climbing the stiles of the years into fresh meadows of memories.

"The ball at Thorns, the year the bay froze, and everybody either skated or slid. . . . White, of course, being only seventeen, and nine petticoats, *all* starched. We wore stockings over our shoes, in case the carriage broke down, and my sister Anne forgot to take them off. Black worsted, my dear, of the most serviceable kind, and she danced three times before she was told. Well, you see, it was a delicate matter in many ways, and, after all, the family foot could stand more than most. Threes always, and Colonel Bellingham proposed to her, just the same."

"You were married in June, weren't you, and your bonnet was trimmed with lilies of the valley?"

"Yes, and the keepers brought great bunches from the woods, and there were bells on the bridle-reins, and everything with lavender bags throughout. . . . I was some time in learning to manage the oven—we did not come into the property just at once—but people asked us to dinner, and that helped us along. . . . No, the brown was Richard, and the red was Miles, and the floss silk with the blue ribbon, little Jane. . . . We kept Bill, you see, so we did not need his curls. . . ."

He roused to find Faussett bending over him with real concern.

"I've walked you too far, I'm afraid. I forgot you were still in the doctor's hands. I do hope you won't be laid up again after this. Perhaps you'll excuse me while I go and get the cart round. I'm driving Julian, anyhow, so it isn't any trouble, and I love turning out on a ripping night like this. Get my dear old

mother to make you some fresh tea. That cup is stone cold."

Luis shook himself awake with apology and shame.

"I'm afraid I was beguiled by your charming room—not that that is any excuse; but, to tell the truth, I don't sleep so very well, over at Thorns. The hills are so near, and one never seems to be free of the sheep. And somehow—it is very absurd—I so often dream of ships in a storm."

There was a little silence after he had spoken, as if the words had caused a certain shock, and the younger folk appeared to draw away. In the comradeship of the open he had seemed completely one of themselves, but suddenly he was a stranger once more. They remembered the history that was alive in him to-day. Such as he had been that long-ago waif, who, for all his poverty and loss, had yet stamped himself upon the race past obliteration, so that not only his very guise walked the English earth time and again, but his alien soul informed it, rebellious and pent. Luis, under the homely, northern roof, became all at once exotic, disturbing, immeasurably aloof.

It was his hostess who replied, at length, linking his speech with others out of the past. Bill made a movement as if to stop her, then checked himself, and stood back. She had known Gaspar, it seemed, for half of his shortened and restless life, and he, also, had dreamed of ships. It was always so with the Spanish Huddlestons, she said—so others had always said that others had always said. It was the tragedy of the past keeping itself alive by means of their sub-conscious thought. That was why the strain never lost its strength, nor the old legends ceased to be. In their sleep the Spanish Huddlestons were always waifs on a hostile shore.

" He was very charming, and we all loved him . . . he gave us so much to talk about when we were dull. But he made his wife very sad, as they say the Spanish Huddlestons always do, never being quite all in one place. He was mad about sailing, like the rest, and he had several boats on the bay. He had a house, too, on the edge of the sands. We often heard he was drowned, but he always reappeared, very pleasant and glad to be back for at least a couple of weeks. The *Gazette* used to keep an obituary notice ready filed at hand, and one week it got into the paper, by mistake. And when he did die, it was just like anybody else, standing about at Grasmere Sports, in the rain."

Bill had slipped out while she talked, weaving her tale on the fragile loom of her aging mind; and came back to the sound of hoofs on the wet drive. Through the square of the low hall-door they could see the horse as it chafed and stamped, with a shadowy boy at its head, the vague lamps, as it fretted, throwing pale globules of light on the air not yet dark enough to give it back. There was a moon setting its shining feet on the ladder of the mist, and the trees were sharpening at the edge. Horse and trap were mere, black, bodiless silhouettes, thrown on an oval of pearly sky, with, presently, Bill on the box-seat, grown into the frame. Julian came up beside him, and Luis swung at the back, all of them strangely unreal in the magic light. The boy melted before the shafts, and the drive began to slip, with the soft crunch of fine-worn gravel, beneath the wheels. Away from the stranger's eyes the pleasant house stood off, its angles blurring, and its lights dwindling, until the final turn into the road wiped it out with one, soft, single smudge of dusk.

After a while there was another drive, with more

lights, voices, greetings and farewells. Luis was half asleep again, by now, and Bill resisted the Garnetts' efforts to persuade them in, hauling his tired passenger to the front seat, and driving off despite detaining hands. With both men, trotting back into the wide, silent night, went a picture of Julian, bright with all the pleasure of the day.

"No storm-dreams, to-night!" Bill said, as new hedge-wraiths took them in embrace. "There will be scarcely so much as a wandering wind along the tops."

"It is on the stillest nights that I dream most," Luis replied. "The silence wakes me, and sets my nerves on edge. I sleep most happily when there is a gale shrieking round the walls."

"I sleep beautifully always," Bill said, in his serene tones. "You see, I have never been ill, never had any troubles or aches, never even been crocked out hunting, or anything like that. Any sort of weather rocks my cradle. I like to hear the wind slinging through the air like a whistling shell, and to feel the house shaken and bumped like a naughty child, but it is these quiet nights that I love best, perhaps because they come so often on the heels of the most perfect days. There is no drawn sword between days and nights such as these. Just when the daylight first begins to go, you can see the pair of them linking hands."

The park was shaping before them now, and a child ran to the gates from a yellow square burned in the dark lodge-face. The winding road went up through the avenue-cave, down which the lights of the house gleamed like those of a motionless ship in mid-Channel. On the beech-hedges, when they came to them, were the lacy garments of the mist, and the horse's hoofs were sunk in the fringe of its trailing skirts. Above

and before, so little darker than the bending sky that they might have passed with it as one, but infinitely more mysterious, because more personal and suggestive, were the huge carcasses of the fells.

"It's a good world!" Bill was murmuring, as the slim wheels hushed upon invisible wet leaves. He was very happy to-night, with that extra touch of exquisite content which he seemed to draw from a thoroughly haphazard day on the land. "I hope I shan't die until I feel as old as the world. A hundred lives wouldn't be long enough to take it all in. And yet people don't care—not half as much as they ought; lots of them don't even know. Why, the most beautiful, priceless, passionate things we possess are the procession of the seasons and the graduated scale of nights and days! And we can't lose them while we live; that's the amazing comfort of it all. Every fine autumn and lovely spring, I think of all those still to come, until I feel so rich that I can hardly carry myself home. Another splendid thing is that you never lose those that have gone, because of the family likeness running all through. Time and again you wake to find a copy of some day that seemed too perfect ever to be reborn, and you give it your heart as you gave to its mother of last year, or its ancestress of long ago. The sound and the scent of the years, too, as well as the sight—they're all keys to little spring-doors of memory opening upon you unawares. You never know when they won't slip the latch and make you catch your breath. You looked through some of my dear old mother's doors, to-night. You must come again, and take a peep through the rest."

He turned his horse briskly before the steps, and was off with a lift of the whip, but, once clear of the avenue, he checked and looked up. The quiet heaven,

to its farthest depths, caught at the streaming silver of the moon.

"Please God I shall live to be old!" he said, with the simplicity of prayer. And then again—a prayer direct—"Please let me live to be very old."

CHAPTER VIII

ON the day of the drawing-room meeting they had the first snow. The night before, Rowly, on the hall-steps, had sniffed anxiously as a lost hound, looking up and about into the impenetrable dark.

"Snow coming," he observed to his brother, shivering at his side. They were just home from dining at Cryssop, and the tail-light of the car had vanished round the house. "I can smell it—can't you? The air's full of it all round. We shall get it to-morrow, and it will just about finish off the mauve."

The snow-scent was plain, as he said—that indefinable, warning presence which carries with it both expectant thrill and helpless awe. In spite of the dark, one knew that the freighted clouds pressed towards the earth, and over all the land was a tension of quiet, the rigid patience of a victim awaiting an anæsthetic. Soon it would relax and lie still under the mantle of enforced sleep.

All night it waited, holding its imperceptible breath, until with the dawn the first snowflake drifted down. When Luis awoke, there was a swaying curtain before his pane, dazzling, silent, and light, white against the volume of grey cloud as a young lamb's wool against the dingy fleece of the ewe. Through the fall of the thick flakes he could discern the fells, carpeted and crowned, and across at the farm the roofs were laden smooth and deep.

He stood at the window for some time, enthralled by the passionless yet grim descent, watching the spreading, shapely trees gather their ermine garb about their limbs. The snow settled evenly along the clean, black boughs, as if behind each tiny, whirling shred was a mind that chose its special post. He shivered before this last and greatest desolation of the north. He had had a bad week with Myre, having overdone his strength, and since that day with the hounds he had never recaptured his dream in the Fallowfield lane. Thorns had hold of him again with its sinister clasp, and now, to all the new-closed walls of his prison, apparently within the very room itself, were added the caging bars of the dropping, whirling snow.

As he came downstairs, catching, through the hall-windows, glimpses of a white, twisting world that set his brain a-spin, he heard Rowly busy on the telephone, his chatty voice breaking in jerks through the open library door. Luis shrugged his shoulders with amused contempt, remembering the programme of the shut-in day, to which Rowly appeared to have arisen as a lover to his bride. On the breakfast-table was a letter from Spain, which he spurned, being hungry for it, and chose to shiver about the well-warmed room, waiting for his brother, of whose voluble approach there was as yet no sign. Then Crane came in with the newspaper, and they exchanged a few remarks, but, from the moment the butler entered the room, Luis became aware, as he had been, upstairs, that the snow was on either side of the house-wall, and in a panic of self-defence he fell upon the letter, feeling, as the thin pages rustled into sight, the warmth of Spain glow through them to his finger-tips.

He was away, smiling, vivified, transformed, when

Rowly announced himself from the hall, followed closely by the Cocker, who sank across his boots with a satisfied sigh, as if, for the time at least, to secure him to the spot. Luis withdrew himself with an effort, and hoped politely that there was nothing wrong.

Oh, no, not exactly *wrong*. Things were being just a little less jolly than they ought, perhaps, but that was all. Luis would remember the R.D.C. meeting fixed for to-day, which he had entrusted to his vice-chairman, Moore, not without qualms. There was that important question of the proposed Whythorne bridge, which, unless a certain right of way could be secured, might prove to have squandered the county funds absolutely to no end. He had gone into the matter very thoroughly, and had hammered it, even more thoroughly, into Moore, by letter and word of mouth; and now Moore, with incredible meanness and lack of shame, had telephoned that he would be unable to attend.

“ He said—at least, his wife said it for him—that he was ill, and couldn’t possibly turn out. I’m afraid I wasn’t as jolly about it as I might have been, because she called him to come and cough at me over the wire, but it wasn’t a very convincing attempt. The exchange cut him off in the middle, so I hadn’t a chance of being really firm, as I had hoped I might be, if I tried. His wife called it appendicitis and nervous prostration—I didn’t quite grasp which accounted for the cough—but I haven’t a doubt it was just the coachman and nothing else. He belongs to the old order that simply won’t move in bad weather—one of those jolly old traditions, like ‘The Tenth don’t dance.’ I rang up Lettice, and asked if she would do without me, for once, but of course she wouldn’t hear of anything of the sort.

She said it was my duty to go on being firm. She said she quite saw the importance of the point, being a county worker herself, and it was my duty to see that Moore saw it, too, not to speak of the coachman—understood ; but my own place was undoubtedly here. She gave quite excellent reasons for it, too ; she always does."

He did not quote the reasons, however, all-sufficient as they had seemed. She had said—" I have always been so sure that you couldn't fail me " ; and " I have never yet been to Thorns without finding you there as host." And she had named a third, clinching the point, basely unjustified in its use, since for all her other ends she laughed it out of court.

" It's hard lines that your plans should be upset. All the same, I scarcely wonder at Moore and his man. You said we should have snow before so long."

" Yes. There's no mistaking it when it's as near as that. I rather dread the cold weather myself, and there's something so sly about snow—sneaks down the back of your neck, and over the tops of your boots." He sighed. " I can't help thinking that the Mauve Room might have been allowed a fine day."

" At least there is no doubt as to what it means. Perhaps none of the people will turn out."

" I'm afraid—I mean, of course, I hope they will. You see, they're used to this sort of weather, here. I suppose you hadn't thought of showing up, yourself ? "

" Not if you will be good enough to let me off. I don't know that I feel particularly fit."

" Yes, yes. No, of course. Certainly not ! " Rowly's tone was dejected and strained. " But Lettice likes you, and I feel responsible about the bridge."

"Can't Faussett do the honours for you, if you really wish to go?"

"You're my brother," Rowly said, and there was a little pause. For an embarrassed second, both men looked at the table, and Luis felt the colour rise in his cheek. In all these months of hospitality Rowly had made no single claim upon him, and even his present appeal was no more tentative than that of a patient dog. Amusement, untouched by cynicism or scorn, swept a healthy hand across his mind.

"I'll take it on, if you like!" he said at last, lightly and pleasantly. "At least I can shake hands and carry round the cake. I shan't know the people, of course, but Faussett can prompt. That is, if you really feel called away."

"Well, it's a big point, and I've all the facts. Moore has the facts, too, of course, but that isn't much use if he has nervous prostration as well. It's more than jolly of you; but you'd hate it, I'm sure, and I've no earthly right to ask. There's a hymn, too, and sometimes I just say a few words. No, no. And, after all, Lettice might not approve."

"I think I can answer for that!" Luis pushed back his chair, with a smile. He felt suddenly gay, exhilarated by the prospect of coercing Mrs Garnett over the wire. If blood had prompted him in the first place, and amusement in the second, it was finally the diplomat who rejoiced his way to the library telephone. He went stately, as to a convoking of kings, and projected, through the instrument on the wall, not only his subtlest methods of speech, conveyed in the finest tones of his well-bred, modulated voice, but almost the whole of his trained personality and natural charm. He smiled again as he hung up the receiver and turned

away, looking boyishly mischievous and alive, strangely different from the courteous envoy opposed to Mrs Garnett, immeasurably different from the bored, neurotic man who had shivered down the stairs.

Meanwhile Rowly, according to custom, was being forced through his breakfast by the silent concentration of Crane.

"Jolly of him, you know, Crane. It isn't everybody who would bother, especially when they're at home for a rest, and shouldn't be expected to be unselfish and kind. And he's a career, too, so everybody says; we must not forget that. I can't help thinking I've already had this course. I feel like it, I'm sure. It will be a great relief if Mrs Garnett will allow me to go to Witham. I only hope the Lady of the House wouldn't have thought I was behaving rudely to my guests. The cars won't be any use to-day, so I shall have to have Martin and the drag. Must I really marmalade, by the way? No, I can't take the brougham, because it has to meet Miss Burton off the noon train, but I shan't feel cold if I think about something else, though I'm afraid it tries me more than it did. Just at this time of year I always long to be somewhere rather warm and idle in the south." He glanced at the thin, foreign sheets scattered about his brother's plate. "Those letters from abroad somehow make me feel rather worse. The look of them—though of course I don't look—sets me hankering for sun and orange-trees, and carnations and blue skies. It's silly, of course, because I shall never see them now, and nobody should mind being just a little cold."

Quite suddenly, Crane quivered into eager life.

"Let's go away, sir, to the sun and the blue, to some place like those pictures of yours in the Mauve Room! Just you, sir, and me to take care of you, and nobody

to know a word where we'd gone. And out there, sir, when you're resting and warm, and we're not thinking and fretting, and everything's happy and bright, who knows that you mightn't forget it—pass it by. . . .”

“*Escape?*” The scarcely-breathed word might have come equally from either mouth, as master and man looked each other in the eyes. Rowly had made as if he would rise, his hands pressed against the cloth, and in his face such an agony of demand that Crane trembled and flushed, and felt the tears in his throat. Then Rowly sank back, rather huddled and rather old, smiling as if ashamed at such strenuous feeling at this early morning hour.

“It couldn't be done, Crane, I'm afraid. There's my work, you see; I'm a public man. Mrs Garnett's bazaar, too, and something about extra cubic feet at the schools. New land legislation and all that, which doesn't always know what it means. And I can't leave Mr Luis until he's quite well, or before he knows something about the place—found out what people want and must have, and what other people want and can quite well do without. The Lady of the House might say it looked like running away, and besides—I hadn't thought of that—we shouldn't see the snow-drops when they come.”

Luis reappeared, just then, still buoyant, self-congratulatory, amused. He nodded, with a laugh.

“Yes. I contrived to bring it off. You have her royal permission to leave your hostship in my hands. It was all quite—effective, I think. I don't imagine you will find any necessity to make your peace.”

Rowly thanked him gratefully, almost humbly, yet at the back of his mind he was dully surprised to have been so easily freed. More than surprised, indeed, even

hurt, a little lost, like a loosed man who has been tethered heavily and for long. She needed him always, she had said, and yet how easily she had let him go! They would do very well without him, of course; perhaps better, if it came to that. Conscious of illogical ingratitude and pain, he struggled to be glad of his release, and instead continued to be disappointed and surprised.

Bill arrived before long to find the hall full of walking pots, huge chrysanthemums perambulating upon staggering human legs, while Rowly stood about in everybody's way, thinking out schemes and effects. Through the open baize door Arthur could be seen screwing the farthest gleam out of the family silver, and a chain of assistants, anxious and alert, stood ready to spring at the master's call. He was obviously not to be disturbed, so Faussett threaded his way through the two-legged trees to Luis and comparative quiet in the library beyond.

"Charming domestic sight!" he observed, indicating the chaos behind. "I never realise how many people Rowly employs until I see them falling over one another on an occasion like this. This is the only part of the performance that he really enjoys, and the result will be eminently all right, although you may not think so, just now. Rowly's artistic conscience knows what it is about. Where's the habitual dog?"

"Surely you saw him, as you came through? He's sticking close at Rowly's heels; they can't persuade him to move. You'll hear him all right when the next pot treads on his tail."

Bill was still for an instant. Then he laughed.

"Well, he has him safe for to-day, at least. . . . Rowly's weather, you perceive! There are several brands, all equally detrimental to his precious room.

I like snow myself; its dramatic sense is so strong. Of course every kind of weather has its own signs—its advance agents, so to speak—but none of them gives such definite notice so long before. Now snow has the whole stage ready and the stalls holding their breath before it appears."

"*Basta! Basta!*" Luis protested. "The house is full of it, as it is. Will anybody turn up, do you think?"

"Sorry! I suppose I'm a bore. But the weather isn't just weather to me—not, that is, just a question of thickness of soles, or whether to take your umbrella or to leave it in the stand. Oh, yes, the majority will arrive all right, even those who walk. Rowly has a superlative reputation as host."

"They will have to sink to a representative, to-day. Perhaps he told you he was going into Witham?"

"Witham?" There was a second pause. "Over the moor? No, he said nothing. What's the rub?"

"Rural District Council and somebody's bridge—you'll remember about it, I suppose? Moore is shirking, with several inexplicit complaints, so Rowly obeys the county's call, while I understudy him here. Do you happen to know if I lead the hymn?"

Bill laughed, but with less than his usual frank content.

"Oh, I can put you through the whole programme, if you like! It's decent of you, I must admit, because I understood you intended to clear out, but I wish Rowly could have stopped at home. What about Mrs Garnett, by the way?"

"Placated, as far as I know. We shall receive, hand in hand. In the meantime, I should be grateful if you would dig out the Miss Browns and the Mrs Smiths, and post me as to which is which."

"By all means." Bill advanced to the desk, and took

out the list. "Good business!—the snow is stopping, I believe." His voice was suddenly relieved, strangely so, considering his opening speech. "I shouldn't wonder if it comes out something of a day, after all. I think I can help you to a few points, but you mustn't blame me if you get them mixed."

They went over the names, side by side, the shadowy folk taking on form and life under Bill's tongue, though he had a trick of slipping aside into descriptions of their homes—the village street into which one looked, the Virginia creeper on the next, the trout-stream at the back of a third—as if, for him, the setting was of more importance than the souls. Nevertheless, he made them real, even while his face, graver than its wont, turned from the clearing world outside to the partly-open door, as if looking for something that never came.

The fall had stopped, as he said, and before noon the sun had broken strongly through. The land being full of water, the snow thawed rapidly, leaving beaded branches and roads thick with mud. Rowly had an early lunch, and drove away in the drag, the coats of the bays black under the silver of the harness and against the fast-yielding white of the park. He had, however, a last look at his cherished room before he left his sacrifice at Mrs Garnett's feet.

As Bill had predicted, the morning's confusion had passed, leaving beauty and order in its train, so that both hall and inner room, fire-lit and embowered, had become welcoming sanctuaries of warmth and peace, through which Crane flitted, priest-like and intent. Rowly stood on his velvet floor, a somewhat futile figure swamped by his big coat, looking from the tall trees, leaning their yellow and mauve heads against the satin of the walls, to the tea-service and the glowing

grates, as if drinking in the comfort and rich quiet before hurrying out into the devastated day.

"I don't think we've missed anything, Crane, anything that could upset the Lady of the House? I hope you saw that the gardeners had their lunch before they went? I'm afraid I worked them rather hard, and one of them had a cough; Smith, I think—or was it Ward? I couldn't quite tell, at the time, but it was one of the big Chang chrysanthemums, the new orange shade that we got, last year. Just inquire, will you, and ask Mrs Steele to send him down a bottle of her jolly stuff? Lady Borwick likes a cushion, and there's Mrs Garnett's footstool, as well—the purple leather, with the ram's horns. Be sure you see that the lame Miss Dean doesn't slip on the oak, and take care that Miss Bond has the middle seat in the very front. She ought once to have married a missionary, poor thing, and every little helps. And Faussett, you'll back up Luis as much as you can, in your own jolly little way? We must all look alike to him, you know, and very dowdy and dull—that is, I do, I mean, of course, not your dear old mother and you. Crane, that cover doesn't quite match as it should. What do you say to blue for our scheme, this year? I've a fancy I should like it—if I'm allowed."

His gaze wandered to the cold park, as if he spoke to something without; appealed to something that he could not see, that hearkened, but withheld consent. He began to move round the room, laying a finger on glossy surface and silken fold, as if the very contact gave him joy; finally, along the line of little, coloured gems glowing defiance at the winter's day.

The picture that held him last showed a corner of a monk's cell, flooded with a clear, morning sun, so that the tiny room, bare and vivid in the strong, pure light,

was yet indescribably full of an exalted ease. Through the square in the wall where the shutter was flung wide, an Italian hillside dropped to the feet of others climbing beyond, and the Italian sky stooped to the curve of the earth and laid a band of blue across the window's top. A young monk leaned against the frame, half-prayerful, half-smiling, utterly content. Over the whole was a peace that was not lassitude, joy, not passive, but eagerly alive, an atmosphere of happy warmth which exalted spirit and sense alike.

"Lucky chap, that!" Rowly said wistfully, digging his hands into his absurd coat. "You can see he knows he's the right man in the right place. Plenty of quiet time to think, and the sort of work that he likes, and that he needn't run after with a car. Such a decent workshop, too, and all that. The Town Hall is red leather and Dantzig oak, and a heating-apparatus which nobody understands. Yes, lucky chap! I always take a look at him before I turn out. So jolly warm, you know, every bit through!"

The Cocker, left on the steps, lifted an awful voice to the wintry sky. When the drag was lost, even to his following ear, he sank on the wet stone, his black nose lowered to his inky paws, as if taking position for the day. Arthur carried him in, at last, and tried blandishments in the pantry, but without effect. From hour to hour came the Cocker's protest and lament.

The Garnetts' carriage drove up, heavily splashed, churning the drive afresh, and followed by the brougham with the speaker for the cause. Luncheon passed off well, in spite of Dick's absolute silence, and a certain vagueness on the part of Bill. Luis had a fine manner, and was in the mood to give it play. He looked hand-

some and alert in Rowly's place at the head, where, as Bill called to mind, he would some day always sit. When he remembered that, his heart seemed to miss its beat, and, with a word of excuse, he went out into the hall, and looked for a minute along the drive. "Not yet!" he was saying to himself, once and again, and from the pantry heard the Cocker crying like a child, but nothing stirred in the park except the drippings from the trees. He had acted upon impulse, and he rebuked himself as he went back, but he did not look again at Luis at the head.

Yet the Spanish brother drew his eye, the whole afternoon, long after the carriages and cars had churned to the steps, and those on foot had carried their sopping boots and wet skirts into Rowly's palace of delight. Luis was rather splendid, he admitted, more than once, marvelling at his tact, his memory for strange names, his almost uncanny appreciation of the personality behind. For the few whom he knew already, and the many he did not, he had the same perfection of touch. He did all that Rowly might have done, yet with a manner so distinct, so full of silken courtesy and state, that the affair, thus doctored and improved, took to itself high ceremonial and the atmosphere of courts. His speech, curiously well-informed on the strength of Miss Burton's scribbled notes, combined with grace the incongruous positions of host and polite collector of alms. He seemed to inspire the lady herself, for her address was dramatic and clear, stopping at the exact psychological point. One could almost hear the clinking of impatient coin.

Luis himself was still boyishly amused, still entertained by the handling of the scene. That Mrs Garnett was gratified, he knew, susceptible as she was to the least

consciousness of power, and there was no doubt that the affair was a perfect success. At least he had sustained the standard of Rowly and the Mauve Room.

And then, through his elation, and across the barrier of staring eyes, of side-looks turning often on himself, he felt the presence of the thing which he would not question and could not define. Julian, with her father and Bill, was sitting by a window in the fading light, and it was out of that quarter, so he thought, that the unspoken accusation came. Dick was apparently fast asleep, with the half-soothed Cocker across his knee, and Bill's head was turned towards the dismal land, to which the snow was dropping again, languorously, uncertainly, like the slow, first words of a mind unmasking its sinister intent. Only Julian was looking towards himself, and at that distance he could not read her face, yet he knew that he pleaded with it, questioned and begged, like a bewildered prisoner at a nameless bar.

He had lost the dream in the Fallowfield lane. Now he lost the light amusement of the afternoon. The place became a prison again, and the people dwindled before his eyes. He thought of them as dormice in a cage, fretting their wheel with little, purposeless feet, bound nowhere and accomplishing nothing. Excitement faded, leaving his head throbbing and his nerves truculently on edge. By so much more had this effort receded his hour of escape. Myre would ask patiently of the empty air why the devil the Huddlestons couldn't take things like other people. He might even plunge him back into the green pool, under the stupefying guardianship of Crane.

As he thought of him, the latter came in to light the lamps, moving softly through the shadowed room.

The speech was at an end, and Rowly's precious Worcester bowl, which had come to the house with a Huddleston bride, was passing from hand to hand. In the silence which had dropped were heard only the metallic touching of the coins and a sound of deep-breathing sleep that might have come equally from Garnett or the dog. The butler was by the piano, pushing aside the mauve shade, and lifting the shining chimney in his hand, when, without warning, the Cocker suddenly sat up, and from his outstretched throat drove the long-drawn howl that speaks of loneliness and death.

The effect, electrical in the dusky quiet, sent a wave of shock round the room, so that people cried out and winced under the assault on the nerves. The bowl leaped into the air, and dashed to the floor, scattering its contents through its shattered sides, and where Crane stood the big lamp rocked, and the shivered glass tinkled along the glossy wood. Luis jumped to his feet, but before he could speak the laughter of reaction broke out, and at the same instant Bill lighted the lamp behind the couch. The comforting glow showed Dick, with a firm hand round the Cocker's muzzle, explaining that the dog had been dreaming of rabbit or cat. . . . Julian was on her knees, collecting the fragments of the bowl, while others hunted the rolling coins. The moment of panic seemed as though it had never been. Only Crane stood still in the piano-curve, shaking a little, his hands twitching, looking neither at the havoc wrought, nor at its cause, but at Luis, bent in apology over Lady Borwick's chair. Bill, crossing, touched the man on the arm.

"Nerves a bit out of order, Crane, I should say! You'll have to go on Mrs Steele's medicine-list for a

while. Tea, now, don't you think, as soon as you can get it in?" His voice dropped out of hearing as a flood of talk swirled around. "It's early yet . . . we can't expect . . . get hold of yourself, can't you, old man? There's plenty of time, I tell you . . . an hour, half, at least. Cut along out, and see to the tea."

Crane responded with an effort which brought the blood to his face, and, steadying himself, disappeared with his usual, gliding step. He passed Luis with averted eyes, but the latter turned as he came up, and looked after him as he went out. It had seemed to him, for the third time, that day, that the room was full of falling snow.

Tea was almost immediately on the spot, served, as in Rowly's house every meal was served, with especial attention to the needs of each guest. It was said, indeed, that he kept a list of his friends' fancies in the way of food and drink. At all events, his hospitality was a thing of note, as Bill had remarked. In Rowly's house you did not crumble a dry sandwich into the dregs of a cup, while fresh brews and Buszard's cakes stalked unobservant above your head. Your own particular dainty never passed you by. Crane's voice, murmuring—"Othellos, miss?—ordered for you special," or—"Tomato, sir?—*with* cucumber, as you prefer," would inevitably enchant your ear. And, behind all, behind the excellent service and the sense of welcome and goodwill, was the splendour and colour of the lovely room, enriching and gilding a passing hour of life.

The crowd broke into groups, from one to other of which Mrs Garnett passed, regally grateful and composedly pleased, with Luis always in her train. Dick,

having dismissed the Cocker by Arthur, allowed people to cluster round him and tell him tales of death-bayings and Gabriel's Hounds. Miss Burton was in a flower-screened corner, counting the cash with Julian's help. Bill, edging ever nearer the door, saw Johnny Ewbank standing in the hall.

Sliding out unperceived, he drew him behind the orange-coloured Chang which had concealed a cough.

"Don't let Crane see you!" he admonished, quickly. "He's pretty well out of gear already, and he's got to see this crowd off the place. The dog howled, and he smashed half a lamp. You don't know anything, Johnny? You don't—you *don't*!"

The farmer twisted his cap with a deprecatory air.

"No, sir. No, Mr Bill. I don't know as I do. But the master's gone to Witham, so I hear."

"Left about one o'clock. He should be back any time now."

"Ay, well, it's not been such a bad day, all told, though I doubt the snow won't have shifted on the moor."

"Of course it's sure to lie longer there than here."

"Looks like setting to again for the night. We'll likely have a big fall."

"Started about an hour ago, I think. Means business, too, I should say. Come, Johnny! What's up?"

"Nay, sir, maybe it's just foolishness, that's all. I'd best be getting back."

"Not until you've told me why you came. You're shirking, Johnny. Get it out!"

The little farmer paused, looking down, then jerked his head towards the hall-door, and Bill followed him into the snow-diamonded night.

"Just a step a bit further, sir, if you don't mind.

It's that dark, just here, you'll never see owt—that's if there's owt to see. Likely I'm just a daft fool, seeking for trouble. It seemed like it, in there—that warm and bright; but out of doors, in the dark . . . there, sir! . . . just by the hollow with the pond!"

They were at the end of the drive, by now, just where it merged, beech-bordered, into the park, and across the open, ghostly glades Bill saw a grey form pass, with others straggling in its rear, few and halting, uncertain of their path.

"Mr Sharpe's horses, sir, put up with us, and I was helping the coachman to yoke up when I saw Them slip into the park. First one and then another come in, but all that slow, and stopping now and then as if they meant going back. It was just as if they weren't sure of themselves and were thinking it over in their minds, or as if they were feared summat would shift 'em afore long, maybe a man or a dog. But they haven't shifted yet, as you can see for yourself . . . and with the master that late an' all. . . ."

Steps were coming down to them, agitated steps which yet contrived to keep something of neatness and reserve. Bill felt for his electric torch, and showed Crane, white as his own shirt-front, the snow on his bare head and soaking his thin shoes.

"That you, Crane? What is it? Anybody wanting me at the house?"

"No, sir. Not that I know." He was evidently taken by surprise, but too desperate to care. "I just slipped out, tea being finished, to have a look for the trap. The master's late, sir, isn't he?—later than he said, and . . . oh, my God, Mr Faussett, there They are!"

The sheep were nearer, now, no more than a shadowy

half-dozen, a dim trio drawn to either side of the road, facing each other under the trees. To eyes grown used to the dark their hesitant uneasiness was plain. It was, as Johnny said, as if they looked to be shepherded by something more certain than themselves.

"There's nobbut a two-three on 'em, that's all!" he was saying, straining his eyes in a vain attempt to see beyond, "and as flate an' teptious as a lot o' cats! I can't quite make 'em out. Seem as if they don't rightly know why they're here."

Crane made as if to pass into the park, but Bill caught his arm.

"They'll be looking for you, Crane. There's the first 'bus coming round. You must get back."

Even as he spoke, there was the crunch of tyres behind them, and a pair of headlights swept to the steps, flinging blinding arcs on the already sightless night. But Crane pushed on.

"Just a minute, sir . . . just to the first turn! They can wait."

"There's nothing. Your place is in the hall——"

"They can wait."

"The Lady of the House, Crane—*etcetera, ad lib.* . . . Don't be a fool! You can't help. Get back."

"I'll be d—d if I will, sir, until I know!"

He broke away, and set off from them at a run, but stopped almost at once with a sharp jerk. Quite plainly, he, with the others behind, had heard the sound of hoofs turning in by the lodge. A moment later, the lamp showed like jack o' lanterns through the trees; with them came the sound of a heavy, muffled trot; and in that same instant the sheep were gone, drawn like smoke-images into the absorbing air.

In the Mauve Room Lady Borwick asked for her

car, and Luis, seeing that Crane had disappeared, went himself into the hall. He stopped Arthur, hurrying away with relics of the tea, but even as he bade him enquire, Crane came up the steps, bringing with him the sound of that reassuring trot along the drive. He was rather breathless and pale, and there were snow-flakes melting on his coat, but he had himself well in hand, and was ready with Lady Borwick's wrap when she emerged on Garnett's arm, with Julian at her other side.

"Your car, m'lady." His hand shook ever so slightly on the fur. "There's the master coming up the drive, m'lady. You'll probably meet him on the step."

He spoke with the privilege of a valued servant to an old friend of the house, but the information was obviously meant for Julian and Dick. The latter uttered a non-committal grunt, and his expression did not change, but the pale rose flew into Julian's face, and the tears came into her eyes. Through the baize door that Arthur had swung aside, the Cocker came violently, as if shot from a gun, his silky body one constant wriggle of frenzied joy, one large, ecstatic smile. Julian stooped and caught him into her arms, and for a moment they seemed to indulge a mutual congratulation and content; then he slid free, and streaked away into the dark. Rowly could be heard now, chattering without.

He came in with Bill, to be swallowed at once by the issuing crowd, standing patiently while they shook his hand, welcomed him to his own house, and assured him of the afternoon's success. He looked a tired, wet, worried little man as he breasted the surge, his thin hair ruffled and damp, the snow shining on his coat,

but his eyes smiled, and his tongue kept bravely to its usual form.

"Jolly of you to come, I'm sure! I feel immensely complimented all round. Such a day, too—yes, jolly isn't the word! Have a cigar, Bromley, before you go? Oh, Crane's seen to you, has he?—that's all right! Of course, I had every intention of being here, but things happened, you know; they often do. The chrysanthemums? . . . yes, quite a nice lot . . . I like snowdrops, myself . . . I hope, Crane, that you saw about that cough? You're sure you've all had enough to eat, because we can begin again together, you know, now that I've got back? . . . Broken his ankle, did you say, Miss Lane? Well, now, what frightfully hard lines! There's a box of chocolates, Crane, in the library cupboard, if you'll be so kind as to look. Funny thing, you know, but I nearly broke something myself on the way home. A trace gave, on Kitty Brow, and the horses got away. I assure you we fairly waltzed! I hope your little nephew likes almonds, Miss Lane? Can't stand them myself, but all the boxes seem full of them, now that I'm getting old. . . . Well, well, that's life, that's life. We've all got to bite on the bullet, one time or another. I hope you'll every one of you be so jolly as to come again next year."

The throng parted a little, showing him Luis, laughing as he talked, and his voice trailed to an absent finish, and his eyes grew vacant and very tired. Bill drew forward a step, coming casually in between.

Still in his wet coat, Rowly saw his guests from the door, lifting one into a car and unfurling another's gamp, stooping to buckle a snow-shoe or to fasten the buttons of a cloak, and standing bare-headed until the last hoof had echoed and the last step had died. The

Garnetts were stopping for dinner, and, where Julian stayed, Bill was fairly certain to be staying, too. Lettice came forward as Crane relieved his master of his wraps.

"Things have gone excellently, Rowland, thanks to your brother, but I want a word with you, too. Perhaps we could have a little chat together in your den?"

"No business to-night!" Luis protested from behind. (Couldn't she see the poor old dear was just about done?) "You've served the world for to-day—both of you—as far as it deserves. There is to-morrow for all the rest."

"Every day there is somebody who will never see to-morrow," Mrs Garnett said; and then, as Rowly nodded assent, she went on coldly, as if answering his unspoken thought—"That is nonsense, Rowland! You know I meant nothing of the kind. But all our to-morrows are so full—yours and mine. And you deserted me, this afternoon."

"I left you somebody better." Rowly's eyes on his brother were very kind. "Got a career, you know," he added, making his usual point.

"He was superb! He might have known the county all his life. Sometimes I could hardly believe my ears!"

Luis laughed and bowed.

"Give me permission to play the part out! Let me have the den and the little chat. I could help, I feel sure, if you would show me how."

She looked at him, flattered, half-won, still conscious of the tonic glamour of his mind; but old chains hold equally master and slave. . . .

"You see, Rowland and I know each other's ways. We work together so well. And this is an old matter . . .

one can prompt where the other fails. You understand? I hope you understand!"

"She's used to me—that's it." Rowly was apologetic and absurdly proud. She did need him, after all. In spite of his brilliant brother, he still held his place. She needed him, if only to use him, trample on him, flatten his opinions and batter him with her own. "It will rest me to have a jolly little chat. Perhaps you would allow me to have something to eat, as well? A cup of tea in the library, Crane, if there's any left. And, Julian, my dear, did they eat *all* the mauve cakes?"

"Crane and I stole you some of your own food." She slipped a hand through his arm. "You'll find it waiting, and the tea, as well." The three of them moved across the hall, but Rowly stopped at the door of the Mauve Room, and a pained little smile crept to his face. The furniture, muddled and pushed aside, had a desolate look, as if so hopelessly lost that it could never attempt to get back. The marks of many boots covered the velvet pile, and one of the mauve cakes had been dropped and stamped. Pictures had been knocked askew in the press. The remains of the smashed bowl were piled on a carved stand. From the piano-top Arthur was sweeping the shivered glass. Rowly stood and looked at it all, and smiled.

"Very successful, I'm sure," he said, in his chatty voice. "I'm sure I hope they had everything they liked. Can't do too much for people, you know, if they're good enough to come to your house. Yes, my dear, Crane told me about the glass, and of course the bowl broke itself. It's the special prerogative of valuable old bowls. I suppose you've never wondered whether really-truly old heirlooms have ghosts as well

as ourselves? Perhaps my ancestress has been waiting all these years for her ghost-bowl to turn up. Rather a jolly idea that, don't you think?—suit you and Bill. You don't remember the time when it departed this life? Half-past five? Well, well, now—half-past five! Just about then we were having that jolly waltz of ours down Kitty Brow. I should have liked your little fingers to pick up my pieces, too, if it had got as far as pieces, you know. Now Lettice, I'm aching for our little chat."

Luis, discarded, joined the other men by the hall-fire.

"What is this about Kitty Brow?" he enquired. "Rowly's snippets of information are not exactly illuminating. Had he really something of a narrow escape?"

Bill reached a foot, and stirred the Cocker, stretched contentedly before the blaze. He had made no effort to follow his master after his first outbreak of delight. The guardian-spirit which had tortured him all day seemed to have spent itself and fled.

"Miracle he's alive!" Dick got out. "String of miracles. Heaven popping like an automatic. Doesn't seem possible, even yet."

"The horses bolted," Bill said. "You'd hear that, I suppose? And you know the hill, I think—long and narrow and steep, with elbow turns. It was pitch dark, of course, and the road was half mud and half snow, with sufficient frost about to liven things up. Martin was driving, and he says he didn't always know whether horses or wheels were going down first. He was done to the world when he got in; they had to lift him off the box. And he says Rowly talked without a break from start to stop."

"Nerves, I suppose? Well, there was sufficient excuse!"

"Oh, not at all!" Faussett was cheerfully contradictory. "It wasn't that. *He* didn't worry, Martin says. He was talking of—well, of snowdrops, all the time."

"Hardly normal, surely?" The other's brows went up. "Oh, I'm not impugning his self-control! I should probably have tried to grab things myself. I'm thankful he escaped a smash."

"I rather think I'm sorry!" Julian had returned to the circle at the fire. "It's so long . . . it's cruel. . . . Oh, Billy, do take care!" The foot had slipped in its career, raising a reproachful yell. She laughed rather unsteadily, pressing her hands to her eyes. "He's so terribly tired, and a little smash—oh, *quite* a little one!—would have given him the chance of a rest. Mother is worrying him now about the Workhouse Treat. Mr Parr is ill, you know, and has handed it over to us, and of course Mother says she can't manage it unless Mr Huddleston helps. He has hunted out the old food bills of years and years ago, and the programmes of the entertainments, all tied with silk——"

"Tales!" Dick observed, to nobody in particular, and Julian flushed.

"Oh, you don't think I'm jeering, do you? Is it likely? He puts all his memories away in lavender and silk. But I'm afraid he has quite forgotten about the tea."

"He seems bent on starving himself," Luis said, with a slight frown. "There is really no sense in the way he behaves! It is almost as if he knew he was nearing the end of his life, and did not care how fast he threw it away."

"Oh, don't say it!" Julian turned on him with a quick appeal, followed by reproach. "Don't say it. You might make . . . oh, you don't know! You don't understand. It isn't that he doesn't *want* to eat—I believe he's hungry, half the time. But he isn't sure . . . he's afraid he won't get through. . . ." She laughed the same laugh, made the same gesture with her hands. "I'm sorry! I'm afraid I was rude. Women are silly about a man's meals. And it's the one thing . . . the *only* thing. . . . Father, take me away, and shake me sensible again!"

They moved off towards the stairs, Dick's head bent to her quick talk. Luis turned to Bill.

"I am afraid I don't understand, as she says. I meant nothing, as of course you know."

He spoke coldly, for he had been hurt by the attack. It was the culmination, it seemed, of the antagonism which he had sensed in the drawing-room dusk. And yet, between such phases as these, they were growing such good friends. . . .

"Oh, it isn't you!" Bill replied. "She's fretting about Rowly, that's all. Crane does his best, and I know you do, too, but it's a woman he wants, the Lady of the House who is an abstract nuisance, as it is, but might have been a comfort in the flesh. Women can't stand a man being hungry, as Julian says, whether it's for his dinner or his heart's desire. *She* can't, anyhow. She would never say a beggar no. She would feed him before the words were out of his mouth."

She was sitting on the stairs, by now, and as Bill's glance travelled towards her, she met it with a little, laughing nod. Luis saw his face for a moment alive with longing that was yet neither restless nor afraid.

How sure he was!—he thought, looking on. Had he spoken already, or, if not, why did he hold back? Did he fear to mar the peace of his dear old mother's last years? Or did this silent and beautiful thing, growing to perfection with both their lives, lie even as yet beyond the reaching hand?

CHAPTER IX

THE snow lay for some time, but when it had gone there was a new soft greenness over the land, as if in passing it had cleansed and smoothed, erasing wrinkles and heightening tones, leaving a glamorous suggestion of reviving youth. It was too early, indeed, for any actual change. The earth would not wake yet, much less stir. But when once the year is turned, there comes now and again a day charged with promise, each more certain and more thrilling than the last, more passionate, more tender, more laughing and triumphant and quiveringly glad, until the whole reality of the spring is here. The "awake, thou that sleepest!" bursting in full trump along the vivid air, has been whispered in the ear of the earth for many a week before.

It was on the very first of these days that Luis went up to the farm. The curious mildness and sweetness of the atmosphere caught at his heart as he wandered through the park. A rare graciousness—that attribute of certain reserved natures and dour lands, foreign to others habitually brilliant and warm—stooped from the incredibly gentle sky. Only from the far tops, where the last, glittering crystals clung, came a sharp breath of warning that the day was no more than borrowed from the storehouse of the year.

He found Johnny busy in one of the enclosures, where a late gale from the west had slipped the loose-piled wall like a pack of cards. Where he stood, there

were sheep for far enough on every side, nibbling the short turf, or sheltering under the bields from that cold whip from the north. Luis came to him by devious ways.

"Fine day, Johnny!"

"Ay." The little farmer's tone was cautious, non-committal, like that of a wise father loth to praise his child to its face. "It'll do, though I doubt it's one o' them fancy samples as has nowt at the back on 'em when you come to look. Well, it's a sight too early for owt else. First time, sir, as you've got as far as this. Likely you're feeling more yourself?"

"I'm better, thanks, but I'm still on the stocks, according to Dr Myre. He won't pass me out. I shall have to be patient for a few weeks more."

"Well, I reckon you'll be used to things, by now. You took it hard, at first—I could see that, right enough—but now you'll be feeling a bit more settled down."

"I don't know that I am, Johnny, although I'm ashamed to say it. Sometimes I think I'm growing more content, and then I get a bad day, when I feel walled alive. I want to be off over the edge of things, like that beast of yours, up there."

He nodded towards a distant spur, where the limestone jutted a human face against the sky. A lone sheep made away towards the north.

Johnny barely raised his head.

"Nay, he'll not go far," he said tranquilly. "If you'll look awhile you'll see him turn just below the old chap's head. Yon's the end of the Thorns heaf. He'll not go past that."

"It seems strange they should keep to their own ground without fence or dyke."

"Nay, I don't know that it is. It's natural enough,

come to think it out. Breed 'em on the ground, and they'll be like to know it, same as anybody else. Sheep aren't such fools as folks choose to make out. There's mighty few as knows the truth about sheep—they as lives with 'em and cares for 'em, that's all. There's something wild about a sheep as'll never let you get really near. Cattle, now—you'll see 'em that friendly, following like a lot o' pet dogs, but sheep take a deal o' coaxin', an' they're always a bit flate, even the old ones as has been clipped and handled more nor once. They're sad-looking beasts, too. Seems like as if Him they called a sheep that often in the Book had kind o' shared His sorrows wi' 'em, and forgotten to take 'em off. Not but what Herdwicks have it less than most. There's something proud about 'em, something fierce and fine as likely comes o' the Spanish breed as well as the mountain life, something as minds me a bit o' yourself, sir, begging your pardon an' all."

"All right, Johnny! I'm not hurt. Our friend is coming back."

"Ay. He knows what he's about. I could tell you a deal o' tales, sir, as you'd scarcely believe. Say you were to sell a score of these here somewhere up Penrith way, a matter o' fifty mile. They'd be back again, over the fells, sometime within a week. Ay, and there's more to it than that. They'll not only stick to their heaf, but they'll stick to their own spot on that heaf, so that if I'm latin' one on 'em as I happen to want, I'll be fairly sure where it's like to be."

"But surely they get away, sometimes? There were some of them in the road, the day I came home."

A stone slipped, narrowly missing Johnny's foot. It gave him some trouble to fit into place.

"I heard tell as they were about, now I come to

think on. Likely somebody's lad was dogging 'em for a lark. But they don't shift much, as a rule. There's a deal o' folk, too, as feel about the same—can't rest off their own spot. I reckon I'm one on 'em myself."

"The Spanish Huddlestons have never heafed, Johnny! Three hundred years and more, and they haven't settled yet. Take your eye off them, and they are round the nearest corner to view the world. The sheep have accepted their fate, but the men are still kicking against the pricks."

"Likely them with souls to rebel take more fixin' than them without," Johnny said thoughtfully. "It's a long while, though—three hundred years—a gey long while. There's folks could got used to Hell in a deal less nor that. It's like as if every Spanish Huddleston as is born is the same man, every time, coming back to have a smack at things and say he couldn't stand 'em, even yet. Takes a lot o' keeping down—he does that!"

"Will he ever be really captured, do you think?"

"I've heard say as he will."

"And how?"

"Nay, it's nobbut a lot o' talk." Johnny became industrious again. "I doubt I'd best hold my tongue."

"Surely I've a right to know? Come, Johnny! What's the spell?"

But Johnny was stubborn.

"There's plenty to hold you, I reckon, without a pack of old women's tales! It's a bonny bit of a spot, wi' brass enough to it an' all, and wi' the right sort o' wife at his side, a man should be fit to bide content."

Luis was silent. The picture had its charm, painted even in those simple words. But at present his only love was his career, and he had never wanted a settled home. . . .

"It has never proved enough yet, from all one hears. It seems as though something else might be needed, as well. What do the old women recommend?"

Johnny looked resigned.

"Nay, what, if you will have it, you must! It's likely nobbut a string o' lies, though I've heard it more nor a score o' times. It frames summat like this. 'The first Spanish Huddleston come fighting his fate, and the wrath of him's alive to this day. He made his home, and got wed, but he was shammed on it all the while, seeing as he'd learned to love his country's foes. Them as come after him can't rest because he was shammed, but must always be shifting off and running back. If ever a Spanish Huddleston comes to bide, it'll be with a humble, asking heart and a sacrifice o' good-will. He'll travel the same road, and he'll knock at the same door, and, once on the other side, he'll fret and curse no more. He'll bide happy, and sleep sound.'"

"It might be clearer, with advantage. What do you take it to mean?"

"Nay, I reckon that's your job, not mine; not but what you'd best let it be. I doubt you're not over-wise, sir, standing about so long. It's nobbut a winter's day, when all's said, and there's a bit of a thin wind an' all."

CHAPTER X

ROWLY seemed far from well on the morning of the Treat. Even Crane could not persuade him to breakfast, and, later on, Luis found him sitting at his desk with his head against his hand. He started when his brother came in, and began to sort his papers with fingers that were not quite steady. Luis, however, was not thinking of him at that moment.

"I've heard again from Horne," he began, pausing on the hearth. "He has written very kindly all along. He was a friend of our grandmother's, as I expect you know—always made a point of visiting her when he was in England, and came to see the last of her when she died. I owe him a good deal, and I think he was sorry to lose me when I left. The man at present in my place is a Teague—Wallace Teague's only son—and Horne writes that he does not seem likely to last."

"Ill, poor chap?" Rowly inquired, without looking up. With that head of his it was easy to believe that the whole world was ill to-day.

"Oh, not at all!" Luis gave a quick laugh. "Merely a wandering mind turned upon extraneous affairs. I fancy he hasn't been much of a success, all along, and Horne seems more than willing he should presently follow his mind."

"Is he wanting you back?" Rowly wrote a wrong date on the back of an envelope, and crossed it out again.

"Well, he suggests I might make a point of considering myself cured. Of course, I'm only too ready to entertain the idea, but unfortunately Myre does not altogether agree."

"You're fitter, though, than you were," Rowly said, in a tone which fought with two opposite desires. "Put on weight a bit, I fancy, and can knock about, and all that."

"Oh, yes. I feel first-class, thanks to your hospitality and care, though I'm ashamed to think of the time I must have given you, at first. But Myre seems to think I should do better to wait."

There was a short pause, while Rowly continued to write wrong dates. When he spoke at last, his voice was appealing and almost ashamed.

"I think I should like you to wait, too. So much jollier to be sure that you're really all right before you run any risks. And, besides, I like to have you about. I haven't much time to be lonely, of course, but I *do* like to think you're about. You're so jolly to look at, you know—handsome and all that, and got a career. Soothes one, don't you think, to have a decent face opposite at meals? I've always been such an ugly brute myself."

Luis crimsoned boyishly, embarrassed and amused.

"It has been more than good of you to put up with me at all! I was afraid I had proved an absolute bore. I shall be sorry to leave you after all these months. Almost I believe I shall be sorry to leave Thorns! But I don't want Horne to think that I am beginning to shirk."

"No, no! No, no!" Rowly agreed feverishly, swinging round to the opposite point. He sat up, and looked at his brother. "I'm an ass, a selfish ass, and you're perfectly right. People don't like you to keep

on saying no. They so often think that you've something better in your eye, or that you don't happen to like their cook. And as long as you're sure of your health—no, I won't influence you at all. You might leave a photograph, perhaps, if you've one to spare. You've never given me one yet."

The telephone bell rang with a violent whirl, and he tried to rise from his chair, catching for support at the desk. Luis looked at him attentively, at last.

"What is it, old man? You don't look very fit. Sit down, and let me answer the call."

The bell shrilled again. Rowly subsided with an apologetic smile.

"I've a cold, I think. My head's all wrong—like a boat with the ballast shifting about. Do you mind—at once? She doesn't like to be kept."

"Why—how on earth . . . ?"

Rowly looked ashamed.

"Of course, I'm an ass, but I always know when she's on the wire. The bell sounds different, though of course it can't. Smarter, somehow—yes, an ass! You'll see for yourself."

At all events he heard. It was certainly Lettice. She had the sweetest of greetings for Luis, but wished emphatically for Rowland. There were things of importance to be said.

Luis began well, but went to pieces almost at once.

Rowland was slightly under the weather, this morning, and was actually, for the first time within the memory of man, trying to rest. He was not precisely in bed, nor was he exactly lying down, but he certainly seemed far from well. His head was bad, and he appeared to have caught a chill. No, it was not influenza, as far as they knew, or anything infectious and upsetting like that,

but still it was probably as well to take the matter in time.

It was at this point that Luis lost his nerve, having the misfortune to remember Moore and his unconvincing cough. Presently he stepped aside with a rueful smile, politely, but strengthily dismissed.

"Sorry, old man! I'm afraid I'm no use. You'll have to take it on, if you can."

Rowly always could where Lettice was concerned. The conclusion, of course, was never for a moment in doubt. He said various vague things about somebody's head, but, likewise remembering the defaulting Moore, made no real effort to defend his case. He had every intention of being present to-night; in fact, he had been living for it for days. It was not in the least likely that he would miss such a pleasure and event, simply on account of a ridiculous head.

There was a pause, during which the voice at the other end spoke at length, and Rowly's face grew troubled and surprised. He would see to it, he said, at last, when the monologue came to a close. He had not been near the Workhouse for some time, but he would look into the affair to-night. She was always so well-informed that she made him ashamed. And, of course, as always, he was hers to command.

"You promised a good deal," Luis observed, as he rang off, "but I hardly think you will carry it out. I'm sorry I bothered you about Horne. I wish you would go to bed, and let me send for Myre."

"I don't quite see how I could manage that. Lettice would be vexed if I didn't turn up. And there's something I should have seen to before, but I've been so pressed that I've had to let the place slide. Of course, I send them papers and shawls and shag, but they do

like a handshake and a little chat about the latest death. Keeps everybody jolly, don't you know, and goodness knows they need it, poor old things! There's nothing wrong with me, of course—at least, so Lettice says. She mentioned phenacetin and antipyrin, and something about Christian Science. She's sending some of them round by Bill. He's over at Roselands, so she says, rehearsing for to-night."

In an incredibly short time Bill arrived with the bottles, and—incidentally—with Julian and Dick. Julian took command at once, administered a dose, darkened the room, cushioned the sofa, and dispatched Crane for rugs. Faussett and Luis stood at attention, trying to hand things, and were eventually thrown out. Dick was left, finally, in the rôle of professional sleep-inducer, with Whitaker's Almanack as a last resource. It was not until he was out in the hall that Luis found himself wondering why they had all behaved as if Rowly had been at his last gasp.

"Agitating him, aren't we?" he said to Bill. "Surely there is no cause for alarm? He wouldn't hear of having Myre, but I'll send for him now, if you think it wise."

Bill looked down at the floor.

"No, I think not," he said, after a pause. "We'll wait and see how he is, this afternoon. I suppose we did look rather absurd, tearing up with drugs and long faces and good advice for nothing worse than an ordinary chill, but Julian insisted on coming to judge for herself. She wanted her mother to let him off the Treat, but of course it wasn't the slightest use. You tried it yourself, I think, and with equal success? I know, because I heard the answers at the other end. Dick had to come as well, because Rowly's Lady of the House isn't exactly obvious on the step, and I came because we are

rehearsing, Julian and I, and I can't afford to let her out of my sight." He turned to the latter, as she approached. "Do you think we might go on trying my song?"

"Here?" Julian looked reproachfully surprised. "Supposing he were to hear us, and be disturbed? It seems callous, in any case, when he is ill."

"Nothing dangerous, you know," Bill replied, with a cheerful air. "Luis thinks we're making too much of a fuss. Let us go to Fallowfield, and practise there. Now I come to think of it, my dear old mother may be wanting me to run errands, so Luis can come along and do them instead. Your father will manage Rowly all right. All the insomnia in the world couldn't withstand Whitaker and Dick's voice combined, and there's always the Report of the Land Commission, if everything else fails."

She looked at him for a moment with a puzzled frown, and then suddenly agreed.

"Perhaps we had better go, as you say. There is nothing we can do now, unless—unless he gets worse. But he won't. Father must not allow it. And you *do* want more practice, Billy, that's true. There's no reason why you should be a feeble failure, even at a Workhouse Treat. He sings quite nicely," she added kindly, turning to Luis. "We are having lantern-slides to illustrate songs, and Bill is to be one of the voices out of the dark. Will you come to Fallowfield, if you have nothing else to do? We have only the small car, but Bill can sit on the step."

Luis found Mrs Faussett tied into a large apron, superintending the creation of the buns which she was to present to the old folks at the conclusion of the tea. The pleasant smell of baking filled the pink-washed

kitchen, where the old lady counted the delicately-browned pile, achieving a different result, each time. Luis went and counted with her, fetched the large market baskets from the pantry, and clean cloths from the cupboard, packed and patted and ranged and covered in. From the parlour came the sound of Bill's tranquil singing and the murmur of the piano below.

"One hundred and seven—or was it eight? . . . including the sick who have to stay upstairs? I asked the doctor if I might . . . he's quite a dear . . . a comfy thing to hold in your hand, even if you're not allowed a bite. Then there's the master's little girl, I've forgotten her age . . . one hundred and nine, or was it ten? . . . but of course she must have her bun, the sweet! The House is always very full at this time of year; the weather, I suppose, and something rather extra in the way of food. Some of them are so regular that you don't need to think twice before you bow. My husband always went to the Treat, because he said he met so many of his old friends. I wish you could have seen him when we were married, but I never had more than one, and I lent it to the curate, and a coloured one at that; not but what we're all honest here, and I wouldn't for worlds say anything of the sort."

She subsided into the big wooden rocker, and Luis found a place on the dresser-top.

"Bill can't be like him, I suppose, since he is the image of yourself?"

"Only in his voice. It is the same voice, only a different language, you know, but perhaps they keep up with the fashions in Heaven. Sometimes, when I'm snoozing in the parlour, and Bill is talking, out on the lawn, I pretend that he is Henry instead, and that I can see him any moment I choose. I steal across the

room, just as the children do, from one flower of the pattern to the next, and when I reach the piano I see the edge of his sleeve, and by the yellow silk fire-screen I can see his hand, and I know that the knob on the shutter will be his face, but I never get as far as that, because it is against the rules. Now, if only I hadn't lent it to the curate, and a coloured one at that ! ”

“ Did my grandfather go to the Treat, too, and bow to his old friends ? ”

“ Oh, yes—always supposing that he was at home. He had more than most of us, you know, because he ran about so much, and although he was very proud, he would always speak politely to a beggar in the road. He used to call them ‘ Excellency,’ as he said they did to each other in Spain. It always troubled the servants very much. They thought he ought to have considered *them*. They were not nearly so upset because he had such queer people at his house on the sands, though it was a sad trouble to his wife. Perhaps you have been to Arneshead, by now ? The house is at the farthest point of all. He had bad nights at Thorns, like you, and quite often he would get up and gallop down to Garden Nook, to finish his sleep there. But most of the time he was off in his boats, hurrying away to the other end of things, and coming home just as fast. I'm not saying he didn't try—to settle, you know, and be in at his meals, like everybody else—but it was never any use. Once, he even made a bonfire of his newest boat, and had a parson to read things over it while it burned, but he had the plans for a fresh one in his pocket, all the time. He said that there was a curse on the Spanish Huddlestons, and that, until it was scotched, they would never rest in one place—

never be all there, so to speak, though indeed you don't look it, I'm sure ! ”

“ I heard something of the same kind, the other day. It seems that the first of us succumbed to English wiles, and was so ashamed that he laid a curse upon the rest. The Spanish Huddlestons who try to live at Thorns are condemned to copy the Flying Dutchman all their days. But there was also a cryptic hint at a cure. One of us was to travel the same road, knock at the same door Did my grandfather ever speak of that ? ”

Quite suddenly, the colour came into her face, and she rose, rather shakily, to her feet.

“ He may have done, but he was so often away, and there were so many kind people who said the things for him that he might have said if he had been here to say them for himself. . . . I forget if we made it a hundred and twelve ? ”

She moved anxiously towards the buns, but Luis laughingly prevented her, holding his arms wide.

“ Not twelve. Nine. Please tell me what it all means ! ”

“ A glass of wine and a piece of cake ? . . . Oh, really, I should like to pass ! Bill said you were not to be teased with tales, and Henry's old brown sherry always went down exceedingly well.”

“ What road ? Did my grandfather ever try it ? *What* road ? ”

She pressed her hands nervously together, looking up into his laughing face.

“ Oh, my dear, if you please ! The old road, you know—the road on which the Spanish Duke ran away, after Drake had beaten him at bowls. Gaspar meant to try it, and was building a boat, but he never did it,

after all, because of pleurisy and Grasmere Sports. . . .
Just a little piece of cake, and a small glass of wine ! ”

The tears came into her eyes, and he dropped the point instantly, stooping to kiss her hand, at which she smiled at once through the tears, and trotted away to look for her keys. He went into the hall while he waited her return, and listened at the parlour-door to the music within. Bill, considered to have in some measure attained, was running through his song for the last time.

“ There’s stamping on the gravel-ride,
And spurs along the hall.
There’s music at the covert-side,
The finest song of all.

I kissed you in a long, green lane,
Just when the shadows fall,
And at the last we kissed again,
The sweetest kiss of all.

I have not gone so far, my dear,
But I can hear you call ;
Always at even I am near,—
The fairest hour of all.

No horn shall wind along the morn,
No hunter leave the stall,
But I shall follow hoof and horn,
The keenest of them all.

You will not be afraid, I know,
When life is growing small.
’Tis such a little way to go,
My bravest heart of all !

You shall be slim and young again,
I shall be straight and tall ;

True lovers in a long, green lane,
My dearest heart of all.

There is no single happy day
Of all we can recall,
But God has safely stored away,
To make the best of all."

Close upon the pause, Julian began to speak in a low tone, broken by Bill's short replies, and Luis, leaning against the wall, straightened himself, and moved away. He came back to his life as it was with a little shock, for he had been walking with them in their country of the mind. There were no careers in that country, no restless desires, no wander-fever and troubled hearts. The vision of its peace stayed with him, though he knew it was only a vision, and would pass. The breath of its quiet airs was not for him; ambition was too centred in his being, the hold of another life too great. The vision-country would grow to a prison, that most terrible change which comes at times upon all our secret orchards of content. Moreover, where two walk together, side by side, there is not always room for three. . . .

He turned with a start to meet his hostess, back from her kindly errand on his behalf. He made her sip the wine and divide the cake, and they laughed together, standing in the hall, over the little stirrup-cup and the shared meal. Out on the drive he stood with his hat in his hand, making her his grave Spanish bow.

"*Vaya Usted con Dios, Señora!*"

"Good-bye, my dear, and thank you about the buns."

As he neared Thorns he met Dick, stolidly making his way home on foot. Rowly seemed better, he said, for the treatment and the short sleep. He knew he had

slept because he had called him Mary, once or twice—the name, he believed, of his old nurse. As far as one could tell, he would be fit to look in at the old folks, after all.

Curiously enough, however, Rowly seemed almost put out when Luis announced his intention of “looking in,” too.

“You won’t find it a bit jolly,” he deprecated, as they waited together for the brougham. “I like it, of course, for the sake of old times, and because I can help a poor soul, here and there. Besides, it’s my duty, as Lettice says—we always visit the sick together, before the main body falls to—but you will be bored stiff.”

“I want to hear Faussett sing,” Luis replied. “I haven’t often had the chance. And there is to be a magic-lantern, too, so I am told. You can’t expect me to resist that.”

“The carriage could bring you, nearer the time. You’ve no idea how you will have to hang about. Draughty passages and stone floors—I don’t know that it’s fair to Myre. Important letters to write, too, and all that. Cheek of me, of course, but may I ask what you have done about Horne?”

“Announced myself fit for harness once more. I wrote the letter this afternoon. I may possibly have to go at any time, so you must really let me have my fling to-night. I want to see life as long as I’m here.”

He seemed unusually gay, Rowly thought, exhilarated, he supposed, by the prospect of escape. He did not know that the letter, though written indeed, was as yet neither sent nor sealed. Luis himself had not altogether known why he had held it back. Perhaps he felt that the vision still colouring his mind would fade with the

letter's dispatch. To-night, at least, he wanted to be free of any fairyland he might choose to visit. He was puzzled by Rowly's evident wish to leave him behind, but his whole attitude bewildered him at times, alternating as it did between desire to have him at his side and apparent anxiety to ship him back to Spain.

The old, contrived building had all its yellow eyes awake to-night, and voices and steps rang along the flagged corridors and up and down the worn, stone stairs. On one side only there was quiet, where the fruitful old garden lay empty and dim. The yard was full of carriages and cars, driving up to the stone-verandahed front that was lined with tall chrysanthemums in pots. In the big kitchen, women carved the meat and buttered the bread, and filled the shining urns from the hissing kettles. Parsons' daughters and their friends raced to the dining-hall with laden plates, gallantly received by parsons' sons and curates at the farther end. Now and then one of these helpful souls would draw aside to test a fiddle-string or to mutter the words of a part, in preparation for the concert, later on. In the master's parlour, the Ireleth curate wrestled with the parish lantern and sorted his slides, while Julian, accompanist for the occasion, arranged the songs. Other Guardians, besides the Chairman, arrived, and stood at a door of the garlanded hall, with the air of a crowd of little Providences overseeing the results of their own plans. The ladies on the Visiting Committee carried toys to the babies in the children's ward, and grapes to the sick. Mrs Garnett was waiting when Rowly came in, and took him away at once.

"Where is he?" Luis heard him ask, in an anxious tone.

"Upstairs, at the moment, though he is coming

down to the tea, But the bell has not rung, as yet. There is plenty of time, if you wish to have a talk."

"I should certainly like a little chat. Extraordinary that I shouldn't have heard, but then one never does. I suppose he told you how he comes to be here? I wish he'd applied to me first, poor chap, though the new bureau is simply bursting with them, as it is."

They drifted away, talking, up the iron-railed steps, leaving Luis in the charge of Myre, who, as medical officer of the place, knew every soul they met, so that it was some time before they reached the big room and halted in the shadow of Mrs Faussett and her urn. Julian and the curate had emerged, by now, and were waiting at hand for the meal to begin. The porter tugged at the great bell, and from the burrows of the old warren the inmates streamed through the open doors. There seemed to be all ages amongst them, all characters, and more than one class. The women were the livelier, chattering, eager to shake hands, to point to Rowly's new shawls or some other Christmas gift; but the men were the higher type, more dignified and reserved, more unselfish and better behaved. Luis saw one of them help a halting veteran to his place, set a chair for the lady at the head, and marshal the cups into neat rows. Somebody's man-servant, he concluded, noticing the general deftness of touch, but his next glance proved him wrong, for the square figure and clear, blue eye both spoke plainly of the sea. He looked ill and worn, but he was neat, and full of a dogged self-respect. Luis watched him with interest for some time, until a lady, whom he did not know, and to whom he was a mere idle stranger with a foreign face, dispatched him curtly for a plate of brawn.

Rowly was moving about behind the forms, chatting,

smiling, joking, and shaking hands, with the Christian names of half the old folk at the end of his tongue, as well as the history of half their woes. In the narrow aisle he was always in the way, always in danger from swimming saucers and greasy plates, jostling shoulders and inadvertent feet ; but it was his place to be there in the way, bending over old faces, and bringing smiles to old eyes. Now and again Lettice called him to hand a cup, but he was always stopped on the road by clinging fingers or a cracked voice, and allowed the tea to cool while he talked, until somebody took it from him and carried it away. He was flushed to-night, either from the hot, crowded room, or from some fever in himself, but he was more than ever anxious to please and to oblige, and was never heard to mention his ridiculous head.

When Mrs Faussett's buns had been given out, together with the Guardians' tobacco and tea, grace was sung, and the room was cleared. Rowly drifted, as if by accident, to his brother's side, and engaged him in conversation as the inmates filed out, but almost at once Luis felt somebody stop behind his back, and, turning, found himself looking into the sailor's eager face.

" Begging your pardon, sir, but you must just let me speak ! You're that like Mr Gaspar, it fair takes my breath ! Younger, of course, by a deal—not that he was that old himself when he died, and game as any lad that ever sailed."

" Now, now, Huck ! You promised me, upstairs——" Rowly put in, with a troubled look, and stopped as he met the exultant blue eyes.

" Ay, ay, sir, that's the truth, but how can I help ? It's old times he stands for, when I never thought to

see myself here." He cast a scornful glance around the room. "I couldn't have passed him, whatever I'd promised, and him Mr Gaspar's very own self!"

Luis looked from one to the other, from the man's delight to Rowly's air of distress.

"What did you know of my grandfather?" he inquired. "You don't seem old enough to have known much."

"I'm sixty, sir—ay, and a day or two past, though I don't want that any further than you and me and the post. I was boy on the *Alondra*, more than forty years back, by now, and I sailed on the *Golondrina* as well. They were built on the bay here, close by, but they saw a bigger bit of the world than that. The master was all for foreign parts, and there was nothing I asked better myself."

"And since then? That's a long time ago now."

"Not long enough to forget, sir, when it's the time of your life. He left me enough to set up for myself, and I've been at Pulton ever since he died, fishing with the fleet and taking folk about. I did all right until the last two-three years, and then I lost my wife and my boat, and after that I broke up myself, and that's how I landed here. The Union doesn't always mean disgrace, though I doubt I was once as ready to think it as most. I'm a Thorns man, sir. I was bred on the estate; and Thorns has no call to be ashamed of me to-day."

"No, no. My fault . . . should have seen to it . . . no excuse," Rowly murmured miserably, self-convicted and ill at ease. "Pension . . . old servant . . . abominable . . . ought to have known."

"I'm not asking that, sir, thanking you all the same. I'd a deal rather have a job—something with a swish

o' salt water to it, for choice!" He turned again to Luis with a pleading look. "You don't happen to want a sailing-man yourself?"

For a moment the blue eyes held the dark with conscious force, seeming to draw a nascent longing from their velvet depths. Luis was silent, his heart quickening its beat. The smile on his lips became fascinated, almost set. Then Rowly, close to his arm, gave a sharp sigh, and he laughed, shaking his head.

"I'm afraid not! So far, I have left my grandfather's hobby almost alone. And, in any case, I am leaving England very soon."

"You've sailed?"

"Yes, but not seriously."

"Ay, but you've sailed!" A look of triumph came into the square face. "It's there, and you'll come to it, like the rest. I'll be in my grave, I doubt, by then, but perhaps you'll give me a chance if I'm anywhere over sod. Happen you'll remember Huck when you come to the water's edge!"

He saluted briskly, and moved away with a fresh lightness and swing, as if the new days that he visioned were already drawing him youth from the old. The brothers were left, side by side. Luis smiled at Rowly's downcast face.

"It's no use, old man! I am quite aware that you have tried to keep me in the dark concerning the family vice, but it simply can't be done. I've heard of it on all sides. The very look of me sets everybody digging at the old tales. They all expect me to be racing to the bay."

Rowly looked painfully distressed.

"You'll think me an interfering ass, but I didn't

want you to be upset. Here for rest and all that, and Gaspar didn't seem to suit the case. He was very wearing when he was alive, and he doesn't seem altogether certain that he's dead. Pops up, you know—like to-night. I hoped you wouldn't bother about boats at all, but of course you don't, so I needn't fret."

"I like them, you know." Luis was suddenly thoughtful. "I'm something of a hand at sailing, too, though I've never owned any sort of a tub. I could take to it, easily enough, if I were left at a loose end, but there is no chance of that. I shall be gone before the spring."

"Something might keep you." Rowly looked away. "That's how it always was with the Spanish Huddlestons, you know. Things kept them, they said, so that they could never quite break away, although they broke everybody's heart in the attempt. I'd like you to be happier than the rest. I don't want you to be wasted—your face and your career. I've nobody else to care for, and I should like things to be as jolly for you as they could."

"Somehow, I believe they will!" Luis smiled. "I have faith in my fate to-night. Life has begun to be good to me again. I believe I shall have better luck than the rest."

He followed his brother out, conscious of extraordinary elation and content. Even here, in this last home of poverty and age, set in the cold, north land that he loathed, life seemed suddenly lovable and rich. He felt that he stood at the parting of ways, gazing up other roads than the one he meant to take, thrilling to invitations which he might not accept. He would pass on, and be glad to pass, but Huck's voice had been very sweet in his ears; the Fallowfield vision still charmed

his eyes. Going meant turning his back upon both, upon the salt call that was in his blood, upon the country and its woven spells, upon Mrs Faussett, and Julian—Julian and Bill. To-night, however, he was free to pause, to dally with the choice of other joys, though of course he would follow his real purpose in the end. He came back pleasantly to the thought, even though he feared, with the nervous imaginative's fear, that, on the farther side of a resolution, one linking strand might still resist the knife.

They had tea in the master's room, and returned to the hall to find the platform erected and the benches set in rows. The lights had been lowered, and the ranks of faces showed wanly through the gloom. The younger women still chattered, glancing about the room with excited eyes, but some of the older folk were already half-asleep, while the men, for the most part, sat very still, accepting this hurly-burly of good cheer as they had accepted misfortune and the ills of age. Here and there a white head drooped towards knotted hands clasped above a stick, instinct with the majesty of near communion with death.

Luis found himself on a front seat, with Mrs Faussett at his side, and Lettice and Rowly somewhere to the left, debating the Bazaar in lowered tones. Julian was at the piano to the west of the white screen in its wooden frame, with Bill behind her, turning his pocket-torch upon the music as she played. Sometimes he stooped to speak, so that their faces were vignettied by the arc of light. Luis turned often from the gaudy pictures on the sheet to that little glimpse of aureoled heads. The singing voices out of the dark came and went vaguely on his ear as the call of birds flying across a window at night.

He felt the old lady beside him lean a little heavily on his arm. She was evidently wearied out, for her eyes were closed, and she breathed fitfully, as the old do in their sleep. She had been very busy with her urn, very full of talk and of the laughter that was like a grouse's call. She had smiled happily while her buns had gone the round, and the one that was left she had given to the doctor who was "so comfy to hold in your hand." Her own hands were folded now, and her head was bent. She seemed to have shrunk somewhat, to have sunk a little upon herself, so that she looked smaller and rather sad, and very quiet and tired. Luis sat very still, listening to her fluttering breath.

Bill's voice came at last, very smooth and sweet, happy and at ease. The pictures on the screen blared into fiercer colour and increased in size, evoking exclamations of admiring awe. Gallant thrusters plunged through enormous fences, or turned magnificent somersaults into a ten-foot ditch. Stupendous, goggle-eyed hounds raced through stubble and plough with the passion and vim of armies at the charge. A pair of lovers, oblivious of *le sport*, obstructed the field in order to hold hands across a five-barred gate. Presently, there was a little pause, and the curate shook with excited joy as he ran in the last slide. He prided himself upon possessing *flair*, that instinct of unerring choice, together with dramatic feeling for the last, supreme touch. It was not everybody, especially in a remote country parish, who had *flair*.

Luis had been watching the slides with something of pained amaze, and in the pause before the last he did not see Mrs Faussett lift her lids, though he heard her sigh gently, and felt her stir. And then suddenly before him on the sheet was a tall man in pink, smiling out of

a frame of mist, with life and vigour in every line, and the friendliest eyes in the world. He did not need the printed name at the cloudy edge to know what the curate had stolen from Fallowfield, and why.

There was a little thrill through the room, the stir of people who welcome an old friend, not loudly, but with a ripple of pleasure running from each to each. There were many present who had known the face on the screen, but even those who had not were compelled to return its smile. Luis felt that he might step, at any moment, from his frame, this man, long-dead, whom he had never seen.

He heard Rowly say—"Harry! God bless you, Harry!" quite plainly above the song and the stir, and little murmurs followed from one and another all over the room. The curate trembled, and the tears came into his eyes, for he was a sympathetic young man, and he knew that he had a soul for art. Bill was nearing the end of his song when his mother moved and sighed again.

"You shall be slim and young again,
I shall be straight and tall;
True lovers in a long, green lane,
My dearest heart of all."

It was not a sigh of troubled awakening or of pain, but of sudden fulfilment and patience satisfied. She rose to her feet lightly, as if she were young and strong, and took a step towards the laughing young man on the screen; and her shadow, as it came up against the pink coat, was not the shadow of an old woman, but of a slender girl. Her voice, too, was no longer that of the old spinet, worn to a tinkling of thin, sweet sounds.

"I have waited a long time, Henry," she said, patiently,

but without reproach. "I am glad to see you, at last," and reached out to him the hand that wore his ring. The man in the pink coat seemed to lean right out of the mist as she swayed and sank softly into her neighbour's arms. The music broke sharply but without harshness or jar as Bill sprang to her side. Luis helped him to carry her from the room. He knew now what that sigh had meant, that perfect oblation of satisfaction and thanks. She had passed the knob on the shutter at last, and seen her darling's face.

She stirred again after they had laid her down, though she never opened her eyes, shut as they were for ever on her achieved desire. Bill, kneeling beside her, felt her hands running over his coat, restless, a little troubled, as if seeking for a sign. He questioned Luis with a look, but the latter did not speak, though he guessed, in his heart. The fingers crept higher, and stilled themselves suddenly upon the young man's breast. There was no mark on the firm cloth, no roughness or flaw or tear, yet they seemed to find what they sought, for after that sudden halt they dropped, opened, and let the world slip through.

"There is just one thing left to do," Julian said, after she had returned home—"just one thing to make it perfect and complete." She went to the piano and opened it softly, as if it had been full of rose-leaves that might flutter and scatter away. Mrs Garnett's face went cold, as though tenderness and sorrow were things to be met with a shield. Dick did not speak, but the man who always looked exactly the same looked to-night as if he had begun to grow old. If one could have seen into his heart, one might have found that he, too, would have liked to hold Faussett's hand on the

other side. . . . Julian struck the keys as softly as she had raised the lid, and in a half-whisper sang the last verse of Bill's song.

"There is no single happy day
Of all we can recall,
But God has safely stored away,
To make the best of all."

"They are there now," she added, in the same tone. "They are together, and happy, and perfectly well. It is only one more friend around the corner of the mist."

Luis stood in his green room with the letter to Horne in his hand, intending to seal it before he slept. The shock of Mrs Faussett's death was already yielding to a memory that was all sweet. There is no need to lament death for those who do not dread death. Rowly had said something of the kind as they drove home, returning wistfully to the subject more than once.

"If only one could believe like that," he added at last, "one would never need to be afraid. But one is always afraid for somebody, and the cowards are afraid for themselves as well. Rotten, you know, to think that one has so little pluck. Makes one feel that one must put an end to oneself, just to show oneself that one doesn't care."

And from the hidden fell, as they approached, came the wail of the sheep-call in the dark, that is always lost and lonely, and always afraid.

Luis stood thinking, with the quiet house round him sinking deeper into the night. Before him was Julian's face, swung in the pale nimbus of the torch. To seal the letter was to draw a curtain before that little, shining

head ; yet, without doubt, he must go, and soon. There could be no reason now why Bill should not put out his hand. . . .

The knock at the door was gentle at first, and then peremptory and clear. He found Crane without, still fully dressed, his face grey and set.

"The master's bad, sir, since he got in. I've telephoned for Dr Myre."

CHAPTER XI

THAT particular letter to Horne was never sent. The next day found Rowly seriously ill, and beyond that fact Luis could not bring himself to look. He could not turn his back upon the sick man, or upon the duties which had suddenly fallen to himself, since Bill, for the moment, was out of reach. Somebody had to keep things going, to settle the outside calls, and to assist Crane, almost disproportionately upset, in this time of anxiety and stress. Myre, at least, was determined that he must stay.

"You can't leave him now, that's plain, and you won't want to, if you're the right sort. I'm not asking you to stand round with a thermometer and a medicine-glass—I've a couple of nurses coming in at once—but nevertheless I want you on the spot. Somebody must see to Rowly's odd jobs, or shelve them gracefully for a time, or we shall have him all of a fret, and that will mean the end, quick enough. Crane's a bit knocked out, as you can see, and Faussett can't be called upon, just now. And you're Huddleston's brother, when all's said. Where's that superfine training of yours if you can't handle a job like this? Apart from everything else, your place is certainly here. You don't care a rap for Thorns, so you say, but, all the same, you're the next man in. You've got to represent—anyhow, for a while. Later, you can do as you like."

"Later may be too late," Luis observed, and Myre replied with a shrug.

"Everything that we do makes it too late for something else. All life is selection. We all play Bassanio and the caskets, from the moment we first call our souls our own. Every day, every hour, we're choosing, if only we knew. And most of the time we're choosing wrong."

"Then you don't guarantee this particular case?" Luis asked, with a quiet smile, and Myre gave a grudging laugh.

"It may be wrong for you in a hundred ways, but I'm afraid I don't care. I'm out for Rowly's life, or, failing that, at least for his temporary peace of mind, and since I've had you also through my hands, you can throw in your own health as well." ("*Gracias!*" Luis murmured, with appreciative warmth.) "But certainly you must stay."

"Oh, I'll stop, of course!" He smiled a second time. "You put things so delightfully, and in any case I have no wish to leave my brother as he is. But I rather think that this particular casket should go down to your account."

Myre looked at him for a moment before turning away. Perhaps it came to him that, of all perilous undertakings in the world, not the least dangerous is that of opening caskets for other people. But he had the rights of the matter hammered out, and he felt no disposition to hedge; he only wondered why Luis had smiled. It was almost as if he had been glad to have decision taken out of his hands; as if, in spite of his professed aversion to Thorns, he had been glad to be compelled to stay.

Neither Mrs Garnett's tabloids, it seemed, nor her

firm assumption that a sense of duty was sufficient guard against cold, had prevented Rowly from catching a further chill at the Treat, and the fever that had given him his passing look of health quickened its hold upon his overdone frame. Mrs Faussett's death had affected him (as all death affects those no longer young) not so much as a wrenching and loss, but as a universal call which must soon be obeyed. The very swiftness of her passage seemed to threaten the ground under his own feet. He talked much of her as he tossed and moaned, of Henry and the past, and of other things which were strange to his brother's ear. But Luis was not often allowed in the sick-room. Crane, it seemed, had always some excuse for fetching him away, or Julian would send for him with some request. Or, again, Dick, finding him outside the bedroom door, would remove him mutely, to guard him—mutely—somewhere downstairs.

They went together to pay the last honour to the old lady, and on the following day Bill came to Thorns. He had with him a middle-aged man who refused to enter the house. This was Ney, head of the Manchester firm of cars, the cousin-uncle of whom Faussett had often talked. Rowly, whose cars were both Neys, knew him well, and Luis was anxious to have him in, but was prevented by Bill.

"He particularly asked that he might not intrude, and he is much happier outside, planning a racing-track round the park. He wants to take me back with him to play in the works, and to be partner or heir-apparent, all in due time. He says that now my dear old mother is gone I ought to wake up and begin to do things. I said I was doing things all the time, and he scoffed and said that I wasn't doing—I was only

being. Does it matter, I wonder, as long as it feels all right? I do feel so awfully right, you know. Anyhow, I told him I couldn't leave Rowly, not to speak of Fallowfield and—the rest. I've sufficient money to be peaceful, and I don't know that I want to crawl under cars. He's a good soul, though—a kind soul. My dear old mother and I were glad he came down."

"You don't feel, then—in spite of Ney—that she's gone?"

"Oh, no. I had a bad time with the curate, by the way. The poor chap is quite broken-hearted—thinks it was the shock of the picture that killed her, and absurd things like that. He had had the slide especially made, and went to no end of pains to give her a beautiful surprise, and now he feels he ought to be hanged. He wouldn't take part in the Service; he said he hadn't the right. I suppose you saw he wasn't there? I told him he had given her the supreme moment of her whole life, but I couldn't make him see it at all. Most of us have to wait for our beloved until we've passed behind the veil, but he brought hers to meet her, so that she had no need to go alone. I think all of us ought to be fetched like that. Perhaps I'm wrong in saying that we're not, only there isn't always a magic-lantern to make things clear."

"I suppose I must not see Rowly?" he added, after a pause. "Who is with him, just now?"

"Crane and one of the nurses; and Myre is constantly in and out. Miss Garnett was here, this morning, to give one of the women a rest—they were both up, last night—but she said she wouldn't come again to-day. Myre has wired for a consultant from town, and she was afraid of being in the way. The new man is due about four o'clock."

"Then I conclude Myre thinks that things are pretty bad?"

"I am afraid so. They *are* bad, too—there is no doubt about that—and yet I can't help thinking that everybody is unnecessarily anxious, including Myre himself. I am sure, at least, that the household has given up hope. As for Crane, he is like a funeral mute already. I don't know what the nurses think, of course, nor do I altogether understand my own belief. All the same, I think that Rowly will recover—if he is allowed."

"Allowed?" Bill echoed the word with a little start of surprise, but before Luis could answer, he spoke again. "By the way, I knew there was something missing. Where's the dog?"

"At the vet's, for the last week. Got himself trapped, poor old man, but I understand he's mending all right. Look here, I wish you'd let me fetch Mr Ney."

"He'd really rather be left. Has Mrs Garnett been over at all?"

"Once. Her inquiries about the patient were very business-like and to the point, and then she began to talk of the Bazaar. She made me search the bureau for his latest set of notes, spoke of having a meeting before long, and asked how soon he would be able to take the chair. (Myre was thinking of a consultation, even then.) I was not encouraging, but I'm afraid I did as I was told. We agreed, however, upon Rowly's case, though I trust my opinion was less callously expressed. She assured me that all of you, including my brother himself, were suffering rather badly from nerves."

The colour came into Bill's face. He looked stirred, as if by anger or contempt, but he made no reply. Instead, he rose to his feet.

"Surely you won't go yet?" Luis asked, in surprise. "If it's Ney that is weighing on your mind, you must really let me have him brought inside. You will want to hear the report, I suppose, and you can't send him back alone. There's the car starting for the station now."

The limousine was passing the door as they went out, Winder at the wheel, with Martin at his side. They could see Ney in the dip beyond the hedge, watching the car as it dived into the avenue dusk, where the winter afternoon had already succumbed to the advance battalions of the dark. He was still watching it when they came upon him from behind, so that he started sharply, turning his square shoulders and big, grey head.

"No, no!" he remonstrated, after shaking hands, "I'm not here in the flesh. I came because I've a great admiration for your brother, and I'd a fancy I'd like to pay my respects from outside, but I've no intention of intruding at a time like this. You're expecting a specialist, I understand? If that car of yours is going to fetch him, I hope she'll get there all right. She wasn't going any too well when she passed me, just now."

"I hadn't heard that there was anything wrong. She is very reliable, as a rule, and, I believe, fairly new."

"Last year's model, and one of the best we've turned out yet. Oh, yes, I'm willing to stand sponsor for her all right, but she was certainly going queer. Hesitating, you know—not missing, exactly, but as if she might begin at any minute. Funny sort of action, too, as if now and then she pulled at her head to take a peep between the trees!" He laughed shortly. "Probably she only wants running, and I've been had by the

dusk. I'd better get home before I imagine something worse."

"I wish you'd allow me to change your mind. I should like Faussett to be here when the new man arrives, and I shall be hurt if you refuse to stay as well. Can't I persuade you by any means at all?"

Ney hesitated, still looking down into the shadow where the car had disappeared.

"I'd certainly like to have a look at that machine. Perhaps I shouldn't be in the way at the garage? I'd be interested to hear what your chauffeur has to say."

"You can have the run of the place, of course," Luis smiled, "but perhaps you will honour me first indoors. I should imagine there ought to be tea about, by now."

Lights came up all over the house as they went back, and they found tea already set in the Mauve Room, but none of the men paid much attention to the meal. There was no moon, so that the quick darkness, when it came, seemed especially dense and drear. The talk slackened to desultory remarks, and in turn their eyes went furtively to the purple china clock. A nurse came once to the head of the stair, and Crane, after various noiseless manifestations and dissolutions, took his stand beside the hall door. When at length a horn sounded weirdly among the trees, Luis rose and flung his cigarette into the fire, but Ney shook his head.

"That's not yours—not the limousine, at least. It's smaller and of lower power; a doctor's runabout, I should say, the sort that you can handle in a hurry along twisty lanes."

It turned out to be Myre's Swift, driven by his man, who had come on ahead—a good deal ahead, so he observed—leaving the two doctors to follow in the Ney.

It seemed a long time before there was any sign of the latter, but when she came at last they had plenty of warning along with her, for her siren was in use from the moment she passed the gates. At the third discordant blast, Ney looked up with evident surprise.

"Seems anxious to let you know she's really on the way! Not very considerate, surely, with illness in the house? Any horses or cattle likely to be on the track?"

"A few shorthorns somewhere about," Luis said, "but I don't fancy they give much trouble, as a rule. Perhaps Winder is nervous, knowing he has such valuable cargo on board. He is one of these middle-aged coachmen turned chauffeur, whose apostate's conscience is never quite at ease. Not but what he drives well enough, I believe."

"Oh, yes, Winder's all right." Bill had risen, too, by now, and was sauntering, as if by accident, to the door. "Martin shoves quite decently, too. Rowly had them both properly trained, so that he could swop them about to trot him round. One man alone would have petered out in a month. Oh, yes, they know their work."

With the last words he was out in the hall, unobtrusively in front of his host, and in time to mask him from a view of Crane. The latter, as he had expected, was clinging to the half-opened door, listening and staring at the fullest strain. He swung round as Faussett spoke.

"Hark, sir! What's the meaning of that? No, I don't need telling, and neither do you. They're coming . . . they're waiting . . ." He broke off as he saw Luis behind, and Bill moved nearer still.

"You don't know, Crane! We were wrong before.

We may be again. Pin your mind to that—we may be again.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll try.” He straightened himself with a sharp sigh, and closed the door, keeping the handle in his grasp, and after a moment more Bill stepped aside, and drifted back to the drawing-room and Ney.

The car came up almost at once, and Myre’s voice was heard in the hall, followed by another, low and firm and pleasantly cool. Bill caught a quick explanation to the effect that the train had been late, and the car, apparently, a little out of gear. Moreover, in the park, they had been held up, from time to time, by something in the road. . . .

In spite of himself, his heart jumped, and he held his breath at the words, waiting for some demonstration from Crane, but he did not speak, and nothing occurred. Perhaps the voice had him in thrall, the quiet, sane, and bracing voice. Perhaps his training rose to the occasion of this all-important guest. At all events, he made no sign, and in a moment Bill saw him lead the doctors up the stairs. He released his breath, then, in an unconscious sigh, and Ney heard it across the room.

“Sit down, and take it quietly, my boy!” he said, in his kindly, bluff tones. “It’s a strain for you, all this, coming on top of your mother’s death. There’s still hope, isn’t there?—and if there isn’t, I should say he was one of the few who needn’t be afraid of what they may have to face on the other side. I suppose that foreign-looking lad will get all this, if Huddleston goes? He isn’t much the build of an English country squire.”

“He doesn’t need to be,” Bill said, rather absently, coming back to the fire. He still had the air of listening,

for voices, perhaps, or a step, or for little hoofs on the drive. . . . "He has his own profession, and he is very keen to get on. I don't imagine he would ever settle here. He never thought of it, you see, with those brothers in between. In fact, he wouldn't be here at all if he hadn't been ill. Perhaps he'll let the place, or leave somebody in charge."

"Well, we needn't bury the other poor chap, just yet. But if he does die, you'll be precious hard up for something to do, except pottering about your little scrap of land. You'll either have to get married, or come and look after me."

"A lot you need it!" Bill scoffed, with an affectionate glance.

"You might—as a job; you never know. It doesn't take much to throw life out of gear. Then it's the things that you loved most that turn round and hurt you most, the things that you trusted that fail you in your need. Perhaps you'll wake, some morning, and feel sick at the sight of the green land, and the smell of things at the spring. Then you come along to me and the cars."

"I'll remember," Bill said, "though you'll never have me, you know. Nothing could make me hate the land, and I think I can trust my fate. She is a very gracious lady, who never lets the hungry go unfed."

Luis did not follow the doctors upstairs, but neither did he return to his guests in the Mauve Room. Instead, he wandered nervously about the hall, his hands in his pockets and his head bent, listening acutely to every far-off sound. He was trying to realise his own situation in the event of Rowly's death. It would be no different, he told himself, except that his income would be materi-

ally increased. His plan of life would remain unchanged. And yet, at the back of all, he was not so sure. He felt vaguely that Rowly dead might have more power over him than Rowly living. There are ideals which, like eldest sons, take on fresh and peculiar value when their propagator dies. Rowly's charities, his personal kindnesses, his sense of duty to the estate, the county and the country at large, might whine at his heels like so many little dogs begging for a walk, and it would be unpleasant to have to kick them away. Existence at Thorns might be narrow and dull, but it had a certain dignity and state. He had grown used to it, by now, and was beginning to feel its hold upon the mind. People of very vivid imagination find something to attract them in every life, and nothing to satisfy them wholly in any. Yet, as Johnny had said, the place should be enough for any man, with the woman who could make of it a home. He found himself weaving an impossible dream, and, looking up, saw Crane gazing at him from the stair.

The look on the man's face shattered his vague thoughts of beauty and content. Thorns took upon itself once more its air of secrecy and evil. He had ceased to wonder about Crane, forgotten his dislike for himself, together with all the problems which had troubled him at first. Now, however, they came back to him again. He wanted to call the man to him, force him out of his mask, and get face to face with the truth. And yet, as usual, when confronted with this thing which spoke only in silences or looked from startled eyes, he found himself unable to do anything but pretend that he had neither heard nor seen. When Crane presently came down, they spoke together with a sufficient imitation of ease. Dinner must be early

on account of Mr Dawn, whose train left at 8.15. Mr Ney would be staying, and Mr Faussett, of course. Dr Myre had to go on to another case.

Dawn, alone in the library with Luis, paused for a long moment before he opened his lips. In his mind was a troop of thoughts that would not be drawn into orderly array, yet had to achieve some sort of definite verbal form.

"There is an element in your brother's condition, Mr Huddleston, which hardly comes within my province. Physically, he is certainly very ill, although that particular danger may pass. But it is not only from physical causes that men die."

Luis looked at him with an intent frown.

"That happens to be my own unprofessional opinion. I suppose you mean to say that he has something on his mind?"

Dawn paused again.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, at last, "I suppose you might put it at that, though I am not altogether sure that your meaning is the same as mine."

"Will you allow me to give you mine first? I had known very little of my brother until the last few months, having been brought up away, but almost at once I saw that there was something wrong. I received the impression, from his talk, that he believed his life to be coming to an end. He seemed, as I say, to be troubled in his mind, and I came to the conclusion that that must be the cause. He has *himself* on his mind, so to speak. Not only that. The whole house has him on its mind—the servants, indoor and out; I might even include some of his friends. You can recognise the atmosphere of panic, of course. Surely it is perfectly plain?"

"Yes. I remarked it at once. In this house there are a great many people who are afraid."

"My brother's servants are devoted to him, and with cause, but in this instance I believe that they are actually pushing him out of life. Because he is certain that he is going to die, they are certain of it, too, and between them they may bring it about."

"Suggestion—that is your theory, then? Panic pressing fatally upon weakened body and mind?"

"Something like that. It has been known. The house is full of the trouble, as I said. But there is another point. Something is beneath it all that I can't fathom, that I am not allowed to find out. At times I am tempted to believe that it has to do with myself."

There was a little shiver in the silence which followed, as if a glass had tinkled and smashed; and then Luis leaned across the table, throwing out his hand.

"You know!" he exclaimed, in quick, vibrating tones. "I believe you know. They have told you, although they would not tell me. Very well. Now you will have to tell me, instead."

His will came up against Dawn's in a silent shock; but the latter's eyes remained as they had been from the first, thoughtful, compassionate, and clear.

"I have nothing to tell you, Mr Huddleston, except that my theory is the exact opposite of yours. The panic I admit, as far as I am able to judge, but I do not agree that it is inviting death. To that belief, as I have said, my own opinion is directly opposed."

"Opposed?" Luis stared, feeling his brain whirl. "Why, then, if that is the case, there should be nothing to fear!"

"It depends whether life or death is most to be feared," Dawn said. He seemed for the moment to be speaking to himself, to be laying the matter in straight lines before his own eyes. "I can imagine that, if a man came to die, and he was not willing, and the people round him were not willing, even to the point of battling against Heaven itself, he might not be allowed to go. Not, you understand, because he is held by the strength of united wills, but because he is rejected on the other side. God must be hurt, I think, when a soul passes to Him in revolt. It is not often, you know, that people refuse to die. When that happens, or when others bar their way with passion and tears, they are sometimes sent back. God is very jealous of the dignity of His poor souls. He wants them to quit themselves like men at that last, great hour. And when He does give them back—as I have seen for myself—it is a gift in a gauntlet, I think."

"I don't understand," Luis replied. His voice was rather hoarse. "At least—I should prefer to think I did not! On physical counts, you say, my brother may quite possibly survive. You do not mean to suggest that we should stand aside and allow him to die?" Dawn did not answer, and he went on with a short laugh. "My dear sir, this house, as I said, is responsible for a great deal! I do not know what is wrong, but at least I am sure of this—I have only just found my brother after many years, and I mean to keep him, if I can. . . . May I offer you anything before we dine? There is still close upon half an hour. . . ."

The meal was almost at an end when Arthur appeared with a message. Winder was at the stable-telephone, and would be glad if Mr Luis would spare him a word.

The latter made his apologies, and followed the boy into the hall, wondering, as he did so, why Crane had not come himself.

"Anything wrong, do you suppose?" he paused for a moment to inquire, but Arthur did not know. Winder, he said, had told him nothing down the tube. He looked excited and white, and vanished as soon as he was released.

Winder had very little for Luis, too, except that the limousine would not be available for the evening train. He begged him to come and look at it for himself, meeting interrogation with a deaf ear. Nothing would do but that Mr Luis should come round.

Luis shrugged his shoulders as he went back to his guests. Anything might happen to-night, from the atmosphere of the place, and even Winder seemed a repository of mysteries stupendous and profound.

"Apparently you were right about the car, Mr Ney. The chauffeur reports it completely out of commission, by now. If you are still inclined to prove the matter, perhaps you will be good enough to come along and advise? Look after Mr Dawn, will you, Faussett, and don't let him worry about his train? I can't imagine why Winder wants to drag me out at all. There is something else, I suppose, which can go, if the limousine is really on strike?"

"No doubt he considers it *haut ton*," Bill observed, wreathing himself in a cloud of smoke, "and thinks Rowly would be hurt if anything but the most gorgeous equipage turned out. Winder is the type of old servant who works better away from the master's eye than directly beneath it—from a sort of vice-regal point of view, I conclude. He is terribly proud of the cars, too, like all old horsemen who have yielded to the spell

of the machine. He will be heart-broken if Mr Dawn has to sink to anything else."

It was raining heavily when Luis and Ney went out by the gun-room door, and along a black, yew-hedged alley to the stable-yard—a thick, ponderous, straight rain that talked throatily as it fell, and beat upon the yew with sounds which were curiously human and alive. In the big, new garage, where the doors were flung wide, the oil-lamps glowed steadily in their sockets on the white-washed walls, and the headlights of the defaulting car set two yellow eyes on the blank, wet face of the miserable night. They found the old coachman standing before his claret-coloured charge with a helpless expression on his face, as if he had felt the world revolve in an opposite path to his own progressing feet. Martin was there, too, reserved and grim, but apparently equally decided that there was nothing to be done. Both men were in livery, scrupulously clean, very models of self-respecting, high-class servants. The car itself was one glitter of glass, brass, and polished panel, and the flowers in their bright vases were fresh and delicately rare. In the background, a stable-boy rubbed feverishly at a bit, like one who, by frantic industry, defends himself against the imminent danger of being thrown out.

"Well, Winder, what's the trouble?" Luis appeared suddenly in the square of light. "I couldn't make much of what you said, up the tube, except that you could not get her to move. Have you no idea what is wrong?"

Winder looked at Martin, then at the car, and finally at the stone floor.

"There's nothing wrong, sir—that's the trouble. Not a blessed hitch anywhere in the whole blessed 'bus! But, for all that, we can't get her to go."

"You've overlooked something, I suppose."

"Not as far as we can tell, and we've been working at her ever since we came in."

"Well, she can't be striking for nothing at all. There must be some sort of a reason, of course."

"Yes, sir. That's so. I'm not denying that. All the same, there she is, and no more use than a stack of hay."

Luis looked at Ney, who came forward to his side. He nodded pleasantly to the men, who saluted him as an old friend.

"You know Mr Ney, I suppose? He noticed she wasn't going well, this afternoon. He may be able to put her right."

"He's more than welcome to try, sir, and that's the truth!" Winder's eager hands threw up the bonnet shielding the problem within. He began to speak quickly and easily, as if laying the case before an unprejudiced outsider and a competent judge.

"She was right enough, yesterday—I had her over to Witham for some siphons wanted for the house—and she fairly kicked the hills behind her, both going and coming back. Silk wasn't the word. Sugar wasn't the word, and not a thing done to put her wrong since; and yet look at her now, stuck there as if she was for striking out roots! She turned out badly, this afternoon, as you say you saw for yourself; but at first it wasn't anything as you could rightly tell, more as if she was a bit cold, and would tune up when she got into her stride. But she got worse instead of better, and I was more thankful than a deal to have the doctor safe here, and the car off the road. I was that done when I got in, I might have driven a hundred miles instead of eight."

Ney spoke without lifting his eyes from his scrutiny of the engine.

"What was bothering you, coming up the park? I suppose you know we could hear you, at the house? There was nothing much about, this afternoon, but you were using the horn as if you meant clearing all Piccadilly."

All at once, Winder began to tremble. His lips shook as he opened them to reply, and shut them again with a side-glance at Luis. His hands shook as he pressed them together for support, the effort at self-control turning his ruddy face white.

"I suppose I'd sort of got the jumps, sir, by then, and begun to think there might be things behind the trees. Likely you know how easy it is to get a fit of the nerves? Anyway, she's home again all right, but she doesn't mean having any more. She'll race her engine till she's black in the face, but she won't budge. I've fought her, and Martin's fought her, and we even put on the lad here for a spell—I've seen beginners have some queer luck with cars, same as the cards'll often run for 'em, and such-like—but we couldn't none of us change her mind. It's like as if the poor old girl was fairly bewitched."

He started nervously when he had said the last words, almost as if he had heard them issue from another person's mouth, and looked apprehensively at Martin, who, grimly and quite openly, made the sign of the cross. Luis stared impatiently, shivering slightly as the dense rain beat in against his cheek.

"Where is the other car?" he asked suddenly, realising that the limousine had the place to itself.

"In hospital at Witham, sir," Winder announced.

"She's promised for to-morrow, with luck, though

motor-promises aren't always just to the book. But it makes no odds whether it's to-morrow or next week. She isn't any use to us to-night."

"Well the horses, I conclude, are still alive? Don't put yourself out, Mr Ney—please. We must have somebody down." He looked at his watch. "The horses can do it quite well. There is plenty of time to put in."

"I'd like to have a shot," Ney murmured, still puzzled and intent. He raised his head at last, and closed the bonnet with a snap. "There's nothing, so far, that I can trace, but we'll have her wound up." He motioned to Winder, who jumped to the handle and set the engine alive. It took hold instantly, and when Ney quickened it to a roar, he could hear no hint of trouble in the smooth-running, well-timed note. Throttling down again, he offered Winder the wheel, but at once the man backed away.

"No thank you, sir. I've had as much as I want! I'm not touching her again until I've seen her out on the open road, behaving like a Christian and a lady, just as she always used. She's not canny to-night, that's the truth, and I can't abide the feel of her at all. Try her yourself, sir, and you'll see what I mean."

Ney laughed and turned to Martin, who, by way of reply, looked at the garage-clock, where the thin, black hands made sharp, black shadows on the cold, white face, and Ney, with a shrug, slid himself into the driver's seat. . . .

Dawn and Bill were still in the dining-room when the others returned, the rain standing on their hair. Ney's hands and face were wet, and the shoulders of his coat. Luis rang for Crane to rub him down, taking

hold of the conversation before his companion could speak.

"No hope from the limousine to-night, I'm afraid, and they tell me the other car is somewhere in dock. It was really too bad to bother Mr Ney. The horses, however, are still to be had! The brougham will be round in a few minutes, Mr Dawn. There is any amount of time for your train."

"I should like to have another look at the patient before I leave." Dawn rose to his feet as he spoke. "I regret that you should have had so much annoyance on my behalf." As he reached the door he turned casually to Ney. "You hunted out the trouble, I suppose?"

There was a pause, and then the latter laughed, a strained laugh that caused Crane to start as if the arm he rubbed had shot out and taken him in the face. The five men stared at one another, feeling its vibrations run from ear to ear. Then Ney pulled himself together with a jerk.

"Well, no, I can't say that I did, though I feel a good deal ashamed! One of my own cars, too . . . you'll say I'm no good at my job. Probably it's just a fit of sulks, but at a more than inconvenient time. I'm meaning to trot over again, in the morning, to coax her ladyship into a better mood."

He sat down rather suddenly as he finished, and Crane filled his glass before he followed Luis and Dawn. Ney took a long drink before he looked across at Bill, who looked back at him with his pleasant, tranquil eyes.

"Yes, I'll try again," he said at last, with a second laugh that was more like his own, "but for the present I agree with my friend Winder—I've had as much of

that car as I want ! It seems silly, somehow, in here, but it was fairly hair-raising outside. Dark, you know, and raining hard, and those two men in the yard looking as though the devil was hiding behind the pump. The horses, too, were making a deuce of a row in their stalls, plunging and kicking about. I suppose they were upset by the fussation with the car, but they ought to be used to her, by now.

“ Well, as I said, I couldn’t get her to go, but it wasn’t because there was anything wrong. *It was simply because she didn’t choose.* Standing, she’d run as sweet as a Sunday school, but she wouldn’t offer to pull. I got wild, at last, and opened her out until the place was full of exhaust, and the garage lamps went misty, and the horses were simply raising Cain. It was a nice little inferno, I give you my word—the row and the steam and the dark outside ! Now and then I got a glimpse of young Huddleston, smoking, and very calm and bored, looking like all the Spanish grandees rolled into one. . . .

“ I tried her on the reverse, in the end, and before I knew where I was she took hold so fast that I held her up against the wall only just in time. I fancy the tail-light went, as it was, but I wasn’t in a mood to bother about that. I backed her all round the place, trying to rush her, head on, when she wasn’t looking, so to speak, but she was ready for me, every time. We were both of us as hot as Hades before we were through. Last of all, I backed her outside, and ran for the yard doors, and just as she got to them she stuck on the reverse—stopped as if she had struck a brick. I was so surprised that for a minute I could only sit and gasp, and then, almost without thinking, I tried her forward again. My boy—she took the gear like a lamb ;

it went home on silk, as they do when you drive in dreams, and then she sailed smugly back again to bed, purring like a happy cat.

"I stopped the engine, and nobody said a word. Winder just turned on his heel, and disappeared. The horses had settled down, by now, and were perfectly still. It was so quiet that you could hear the switch click as I turned it off, and after that there was just the engine firing off its shots as it started to cool, and the rain falling in lumps outside.

"I got out, then, and advised our host to take something straightforward and simple on four legs, and he gave the order for the brougham. I asked him, just once, what he thought, for he isn't the sort that you ask too much, and he said that, in his opinion, it was nothing more uncommon than a general spirit of funk. Well, I suppose a general spirit of funk can bring strange things to pass, just as a general spirit of courage has wrought miracles before now, and everything that a man makes with his hands is susceptible in ways that we don't understand. You'd have known that if you'd had hold of that car to-night. I went back to the yard door before I came in, but the night was so dark I couldn't see beyond, and the queer sort of rustling that I thought I heard might just have been the rain. . . ." He raised his voice brusquely, staring fixedly at Bill. "What is it, lad? There's something that accounts for it all. What in the name of Heaven is abroad?"

"Huddleston history is abroad," Bill said dreamily, sunk in his wreath of smoke. "Huddleston history of more than three hundred years, running on pattering little hoofs. . . ."

"Oh, good Lord!" Ney gave a quick shiver, then shook his head, reaching for his glass with a steadier

hand. "No, I'm not going to ask. But that foreign lad doesn't know, either. He thinks the whole thing is just nerves."

"Better that he should. He's going, as I said. It has been a miracle, all these months . . ." he broke off, getting to his feet, his face turned towards the windows overlooking the drive. The rain still drenched the full length of the panes. Ney, his glass empty, rose, too. The horses were coming round from the stable-yard.

The carriage-lamps flashed across the glass, and the cushioned wheels slurred past; then all at once the steady hoofs were dancing and wild, the lights backed again into sight, and voices came up around the brougham in a babel of direction and control. Bill went quickly into the hall, followed by Ney, and at that moment Luis appeared with Dawn on the stairs.

Through the open door they could see the brougham shifting and swinging as the horses reared and plunged, with ears laid back, and hoofs ploughing the sodden ground. The light from the hall glanced in turn from the whites of their frightened eyes to the silver of the harness and the gloss of the carriage-top. Martin had his long whip crossed above the reins, encouraging the horses by voice alone. Arthur was somewhere down in that circus in the dark, and at times the stable-boy tried to reach a hand towards a gleaming bit. Once, as the pair wheeled, so that the lamps shone on the opposite hedge, Luis thought he saw Johnny's face.

"It goes all through, as you see," he observed to Dawn, as the latter held out his hand. "Really, I can't answer for those horses, just now. Let me beg of you to stay the night."

But Dawn shook his head.

"I am wanted at the other end. I must take the risk. You will let me know results?"

He said good-bye to Ney and Faussett as he passed, and went down the steps with Luis at his side. At that moment the horses were comparatively still, trembling and snorting and tossing their heads, and as Crane opened the carriage-door, the doctor stepped in quickly during the lull. But, as the door snapped to, something moved by the hedge across the way, something softly, shapelessly grey, on little, silent feet, and on the instant both horses swerved and reared, swinging so far towards the house that the wheels ground against the bottom step, and Taleteller came down with his forefeet on the next, dragging Newsmonger after him by the pole. Luis, looking round and up in the flurry and shout, saw Martin with the reins twisted round his wrists, and a menace of rearing beasts above himself, before he felt Crane stagger at his side, and shoot him down among the stamping iron hoofs against the dark wetness of the drive.

He felt his shoulder strike the gravel, and the warm, dark bodies over him violently thrust aside, and then he was back again on the steps, ringed by the men who had dragged him out, and among whom his half-blind eyes suddenly saw Myre. He was not hurt, only muddy and bruised and breathless and very wet, shaking, too, with wrath against the man who had sent him down. The latter was at the top of the steps, by now, staring into the hall, and suddenly Luis realised that they were all doing the same, even Ney, against whose shoulder he leaned. They were looking at Rowly, at the stair-head, a thin, flushed figure clinging to the balustrade, where the carved and curling horns seemed to reach to him in support. A frightened nurse stood at his back,

entreating and commanding by turn, but he paid no heed. He was gazing towards the group framed by the hall-door, the group which had been all frenzy and terror and murder and hate, and was now immobile as statuary under the surprise. Even the horses were absolutely still. They did not even champ at their bits, as they stood with drooped heads. Dawn leaned from the window, watch in hand, intense interest on his face, every nerve strained to catch the meaning of this last scene.

And then they heard Rowly's voice calling, thin and unreal, from the stair—calling Crane. He called twice before the man moved, and then, stumbling, with his hands held out before his eyes, he passed the threshold and across the empty hall, while all the time his master talked on, as if by sheer fluency drawing him out of the depths and upward to himself. Towards the top of the stairs he dropped on his knees, hiding his face.

"Crane!" the voice said. "My good fellow—my good fellow, Crane! You didn't mean it, you know . . . you couldn't . . . we don't do these things, you see. And I don't believe I'm going, after all. I feel quite jolly and fit. I've an idea I shall see them all right—so jolly white, you know, and all that. It would have been a pity, you know . . . a really great pity . . . and for such a good fellow as you . . . such a good fellow, Crane. . . ."

Myre was in time to catch him as he dropped, and in a moment the bedroom door had opened and swallowed him up. Luis took his hand from Ney's arm, and straightened himself, feeling shaken and dazed. Dawn slipped his watch into his pocket, and lifted his hat, holding it for a second above his head.

"He will live, I think," he said simply. "Will you

tell your man to drive fast ? ” and leaned back into the carriage-dusk. The horses broke docilely into a trot that quickened continually until the last hint of it was gone. The rain had ceased, and the earth was asleep. The only sound was the sobbing of the man who lay on the stairs.

And, in the morning, garden and park were peopled white with the first snowdrops, lifting their clean little heads to Rowly's new day of life.

CHAPTER XII

LUIS was down by the bay, at last. On that April morning, as he rode idly along the lanes, something had snatched at his horse's bridle and turned the pair of them towards the sea. Spring was about him, in the green of the fields, the cry of the lambs, the dim purple of violets on either side, while over all the land the pale sunlight lay in silken lengths, like the loosed glory of a woman's hair.

The tide, when he came to it, was filling the estuary to its farthest point, all ripple and glitter and quiver from shore to shore. Across, the long edge of the moss was laid against the sand in one sweeping line, as if by a single stroke of an unerring brush. From the foothold of the smooth flat, Wythebarrow sprang, sudden and sharply grey. Away on the pale sky, the mountain range to the north crowded the horizon with giant shapes, which, at the farthest distance of all, were no more than dim, blue clouds poised upon the shoulders of the rest. Still across, but out to sea, where the bay, after widening steadily for miles, drew the arms of the land towards it before yielding itself finally to the open beyond, Cunswick Fell came down to steep its feet in the ripple and gleam. Its sloping sides, catching the sun on their coloured skirts, stood out delicately in pastel shades, yet with the extraordinary freshness and clarity which belongs to the English spring, as if, in that very instant, the earth had been planned and fashioned and bathed and hued.

He rode along the sea-front of the tiny town climbing its wooded hill, and left his horse at the old inn terraced above the street and facing towards the weather-quarter of the west. He passed other and newer buildings before he came to the inn, but he scarcely gave them a glance. That which had turned his horse's head still ran at his stirrup and pointed his way. He rode dreamily, with the glamour and gold of the morning on his face, scarcely conscious where or how he had arrived; but, as he came out of the inn-yard, Huck stood up from his seat on the coping of the low sea-wall, and at once the scene took on meaning and life.

The man looked well again, younger, his own tough, salted self. Rowly had used his first returning strength to speak for him at the boat-builders' on the beach, where he was now in regular work, though, every day, as soon as the weather warmed, he went at intervals to wait for a few moments on the front. When he saw Luis emerge from the *Anchor's* yard, he thrilled from head to foot, feeling the big seas surge past the *Alondra*, as she drove her way south on that journey from which there was to be no return. Luis recognised him at once.

"I have come, you see!" he announced, with a nod and a smile. "I was kept in England, after all. Getting along all right, are you, and feeling fit? You've work down here, I understand?"

"Mr Rowly got me took on at Benthams', on the shore. I worked there a while as a lad, and it's something to be about the boats. Oh, ay, I knew you'd come. I didn't know Mr Gaspar for nothing, all those years ago."

"It was pure accident, nevertheless. I had never tried this particular road, and—well, it was a fine morning! An idle impulse, that was all."

"Nay, but I'll not believe that?" Huck said, in dogged dissent. "All the Spanish Huddlestons come to the sea, in the end. It was just the spring. The spring takes folk different, you see—some to courting and some to fighting, some to fretting for things a long way off, and countries out of sight. That was how it took the Huddlestons, that last. With the spring, they'd got to be up and off, and neither man nor woman could hold them when it come to that. I knew the smell o' the sea would reach you across your fields when the spring got hold of the earth. You'll take a look round the place, sir, now you're here?"

They left the front for a narrow path banked above the beach beside a garden wall, which had a line of heavy chestnuts set like a guard along its curve. The grass in the garden was rank and long about the crowded trunks of the big trees, grown so close that here and there one had stifled and died. Already, though they were not yet fully out, the ground beneath was in gloom, like dark water into which the sunbeams dipped and dived through the lacing of green boughs. The green beeches, further up the slope, were quivering and thrilling in the most delicate dress of all the emerald wardrobe of the spring, but the copper-beech, at the terrace-foot, burgeoning slowly upwards from its heavy, trailing skirts, had already a more burnished tint than they. And then, at last, across the network and shade, Luis saw the low, verandahed house, like a ship looming up unawares through a slanting curtain of rain, its dark woodwork weather-beaten and falling away, its yellow walls discoloured, its long French windows staring with hollow eyes.

"Yon's Garden Nook," Huck said, "Thorns property, as you'll have heard. Mr Gaspar thought a deal o' the

place, being that close to the water you might fairly think yourself at sea. He kept a sight of company there, as might well have been spared, all sorts and classes, ay, and women-folk, too, though that's no business of mine. Your father had it shut up, and wouldn't let it, or even so much as keep it in repair, though there's a many wanted it, time and again. It's the best site in the town, and a bonny spot inside as well. Many a night I've seen it lighted from roof to floor, just for all the world like a ship afloat, and music, and folks laughing and shouting and fairly carrying on. I've heard 'em half across the bay. Wild times it's seen, sure enough, and more than once he was taken in for drowned. Here's the *Gaviota*, the first boat he ever sailed, as was wrecked more than once on these very sands. Fairly rotted to bits she must be, by now, and like enough to drop any day on a body's head."

The wall had risen by degrees to the height of a dozen feet, and, soaring out above them as they stood, came the tarred bows of an old three-tonner, built into the stone, with her rotten bowsprit pointing out to sea, tilted as if to climb some threatening wave. Luis lifted his eyes to it from the white path that had the musical wash of the tide coming and going at its foot. That black shell had been his grandfather's first vehicle of escape, although in the end it had grown to be little more than a moving cage between the prisons of his restless soul. Yet with what delight and freedom of spirit he must have launched her, at the start, like a man, cramped and stifled in an airless cell, feeling his lungs fill, and the whole earth stretching roomily beyond! He must have been so sure that he had found content at last. No other boat could have given him quite the

same, not even the *Alondra*, who had gone down, a continent away. The *Gaviota* alone could have known that certainty of joy, that sailing forth to redemption that was never achieved. There was something vital about her, even yet, staring defiance into the west, open though she was at every seam, nail-sick and rotten and mouldy and sprung, thirsty for the water through the whole year, except when it lashed around her in the winter floods.

The path slid abruptly into the beach, just where the builders' yard, part stone and part tarred shed, nestled into the wooded, limestone cliff. The door was open, and the sunlight, entering first, sketched the figures of men moving about a hull on the stocks, no more than a few days from the stepping of her mast, and the rigging of stays and sails. The firm was an old one of sound reputation, and with a connection as far as the Mersey itself; a family business, handed down in straight descent. The main part of the Pulton fishing-fleet came from here, as well as pleasure and racing-yachts of varying tonnage and type. Here, also, so Huck explained, with the air of a verger in cathedral aisles, all Gaspar's boats had come into being, and through the high, tarred doors had glided down to the sea. Here, even, had been built his last extravagance of thirty tons, her cabin panelled with fragrant woods, upholstered with gilded leather and brocade. He had died before she was complete, and they had sold her a long way off, out of sight and out of mind. The brothers were young who ran the business now, and had never built for a Huddleston of Thorns. There was no one to remember the boats but Huck, or to see the years roll back when Luis stepped inside.

There was a pleasant smell of timber in the high,

cool place, mixed with the faint salt that came to it tempered from the open sea. Along one side of the yard ran a carpenter's bench. The floor, across, was a litter of tar-pots and paint-pots and tins. Overhead, a wide scaffolding was piled with the long, numb planks that had once been part of a living thing, and were soon to be part of a living thing again. A few tools were scattered about the almost finished deck. It seemed a slight enough equipment for the making of a creature fit to fight both wind and tide.

The quiet, absorbed men looked up as the stranger came in, announced by Huck in tones of inordinate pride. They knew his history well enough, and felt a thrill of interest in the dark face entering with the sun, but after a shy greeting they went on with their work, leaving him to open a conversation at his own time. Luis, however, said little, at first, even in reply to Huck's rumble of talk. He climbed the stocks, and sauntered round the boat, watching the planes at work on the coaming of the well, and the fixing of the heavy greenheart along the low gunwales, where any wood less hard would wear beneath the friction of the nets. The touch of the timber was pleasant to his hand, the breath of it good in his throat. His eye wandered happily over every line of her broad, steady deck, the curve of her sides, the black keel that was cut away sharply under the stern. Presently he asked a question here and there, and first one and then another took up the answers at increasing length, until his ears were full of technical explanation, historical incident, personal narrative and reminiscence. And, at the back of all, Huck, boring holes in the greenheart, rumbled almost without pause, bringing the past to the present, and drawing the future to the past, unconsciously epic and immense.

"You sail yourself, sir, I suppose?" the elder Bentham asked, at last. "If you're stopping at Thorns, this summer, we shall look to see you on the bay."

"I have never done very much." Luis stared through the door at the dancing surface of pale, reflected blue. "I learned to handle a yacht off the Spanish coast, but I don't know English waters at all, and I don't expect to remain in the north. However, if I should be staying, by any chance, I should like to try my luck in something from your hands. Your firm should send me to sea as safe as most!"

"She'd build faster than any boat yet, with the promise of a Huddleston aboard!" They began already to talk of size and cut, to hunt out pictures and measurements and plans, interested, excited, and pleased. "You've stayed away from us too long, and that's the truth. We'd see you suited, sir, we'll guarantee."

"You shall have the order, if I stay," Luis said, and from behind him Huck growled an "Oh, ay, you'll stop!" with guttural, ecstatic joy, seeing the good old times standing at the very door, and such a thing as going on the parish vanished out of mind. Contentedly he watched the young man up the beach, rejoicing in the subtle grace that he remembered so well in another long under the sod. He waited to see whether he would stop a second time by the boat in the wall. It would be a sign, he told himself, that he was not deceived, that romance had indeed come again in its ancient guise. And Luis did stop. He stood looking up at the darting bow, as if in spirit following it on some appointed road, and the old sailor turned back to his work with a satisfied sigh. There could be no forgetting for a Spanish Huddleston, after that.

Luis rode home again towards the fells, but he had

no eyes for them, seeing always the bay and the yard where the still hulk was slowly waking to life. In imagination he ran his hand again along the grain of her deck and the sturdy lines of her frame. Already he felt her lift under his feet, her live tremors under the shock of the waves, the strength of her canvas tautened by the wind. He was full of a leaping delight, of an exultation that was clean and sea-salted and gloriously sane. He whistled in snatches, and, at times, on a lonely stretch of the marsh, broke into wordless song. He had forgotten his first horror of the country and his misery at Thorns, for he had found something that promised stimulant and life, and long hours of healthy joy. Of course, he would never let it get hold of him as his grandfather had done. He was too old for that, and, he hoped, too disciplined and trained. And of course he was going away, if not to Spain, at least to seek office elsewhere; but if ever fate should bring him permanently to Thorns, it would now have its consolations and delights.

Rowly had been out again for some time, and was supposed—by Mrs Garnett, at least—to be perfectly well and fit for work. He was absorbed in Bazaar business, just now, with other things which had been forced to hang fire while he was ill, and had the air of a late gardener, digging over his soil in a frenzy of haste, lest he should be stolen upon by the march of the year. The household had settled with an air of embarrassed relief, covering the events of that extraordinary night by a dogged pretence that they had never been. As for Crane, that sobbing thing on the stair, he had appeared, next morning, a shade more rigid and aloof, but subtly autocratic as before, and quite unequipped with either explanation or excuse. Luis had resented his attitude,

at first, and had ended by being ironically amused. The affair took its place with others which he had put definitely away, reluctant to come up against the bigger thing behind.

He found Rowly wandering in the avenue, gazing up through the branches at the slits of blue sky, and was struck, as he had often been, of late, by the ethereal strangeness of his face when Bazaar complexities and their like had for the moment loosed him from their coils. So, Luis thought, remembering Dawn's unbelievable hints, might Lazarus have looked, when called again from the grave. He dropped off his horse as he caught him up, and walked the rest of the way by his brother's side. Rowly glanced at him once or twice, noticing his air of gaiety and health, the brilliance of his eyes, his buoyant swing beside the horse. He walked, he said to himself, as though something alive danced beneath his feet, adding of its own to their elasticity and spring. Their glances crossed, at last, and Rowly looked awkwardly away.

"Just as well you stayed, don't you think, and really finished the cure? Spring morning, perhaps, and all that, but you do look so splendidly fit. I can't help feeling the family owes a debt to Myre. One of those foreign doctors might just have thrown you away, and then where should we have been, at Thorns? A silver ink-pot might meet the case, or perhaps some sort of a mug, with just a jolly little word or two of thanks. I'll see about it, next time I'm somewhere near a decent shop."

"He pulled you through something a good deal worse!" Luis rejoined, with a smile. "If there is to be a thank-offering of sorts, I should like to go shares—on your account, that is, you understand."

"Very nice of you to put it like that! I'd no idea

you'd care." Rowly looked pleased, yet regretful and unconsciously ironic, as at a valuable gift which he was no longer in a position to enjoy. "A cake-basket, perhaps. . . . but, on the whole, I think not. Too like wedding-presents and all that. Lettice has been over, this morning—only just gone. We're to have the Bazaar at Thorns; I don't know whether you've heard? Excellent idea, of course, if only all the gardeners don't leave in a bunch. I've never asked where you went for your ride?"

"You'll disapprove, I'm afraid, but I may as well confess! I went to Arneshead, to see our friend Huck, and made the Benthams' acquaintance at the same time."

"I thought you must have done something like that." Rowly nodded quietly to himself. "You look as though you'd seen something rather big—'put your lips where the gods have drunk,' as somebody says in one of Faussett's jolly books. Of course, I knew you would be certain to go down for a look round, especially after meeting Huck at the Treat. I wanted to keep you away as long as I could, that was all, and perhaps it doesn't matter, now that you're leaving so soon. You won't have time to pick up Gaspar's little ways."

"Yes, I ought to be making a move." The answer was almost forced, and there was no enthusiasm in his tone. "You don't suppose I should go like Gaspar, do you?" he broke out, swinging round. "Am I absolutely bound to follow the same road?"

"It's on the cards," Rowly said reluctantly, staring between the trees. "It doesn't do to play with these things. You can't go to Arneshead, and not feel it in the air. I suppose you know Faussett's jolly ideas about the countries of the mind? He says that people go plunging into each other's atmosphere without a

proper geographical survey, and cry their eyes out when they find they have to live there, and can't, and yet don't know how to get back. He was talking about marriage, chiefly, of course—people getting led away by a mental environment, and wanting their old one when it's too late, but I suppose it applies all round. And sailing's a risky business, anyhow, upsetting both for those on board and those of us left behind. I should worry about you a good deal—not that I matter in the very least, and of course you're going, as I said. It's a pity you can't make it just a jolly little hobby, like my fiddling with the Mauve Room. Who was it said that liberty is freeing yourself from the things you don't like in order to make yourself a slave to the things you do like? The pleasure you ride too hard gets into the saddle at last—that's another of the same kind. A lot of clever people in the world, I always think. You're one of them, of course—got a career. That's why I can't have you letting things slide."

Luis looked directly at him.

"You seem determined to clear me off soon!" He smiled, but his tone implied that he was slightly hurt. "Before you were ill, you were kind enough to say you were glad to have me in the house, even when I was a broken-down object and an evil-tempered wreck. Perhaps I don't interest you, now that I am sane and well. I ought to go, of course, as I said, but I should still like to think that you wanted me to stay."

There was a pause, while Rowly stared at the road, the nervous colour flying into his cheek, his hands twitching at his sides. Then—"Oh, God knows I do!" he broke out at last, as if every atom of breath and of desire was expended upon that single cry. "If only you could be with me—if only you needn't leave!

You don't know what it would mean to me if you could stay. Just for a little while, until . . . no, no, I didn't mean that! I'm an ass, and you mustn't listen to anything I say. Selfish ass . . . ought to be kicked. Of course you've got to think of your career."

They had stopped abruptly during the little scene, and now the horse, eager for its stable, began to sidle and pull at the rein. Luis frowned thoughtfully as they moved on, pondering Rowly's speech and his quick side-glances between the trees.

"I shall not leave you as long as you need me," he said presently, choosing his words with some care. "I don't believe you are as well as you think, and perhaps I can be of use. My career can hang its head for a few months more. Things can be arranged. And you need not fear that I shall worry or fret, because I am perfectly happy here. I shall be glad to stay at Thorns."

He listened to his own words with complete amaze, wondering why his old self did not arise to give him the lie. But it was the truth that he spoke, feeling his heart lift with excitement and joy. And instantly he fell to dreaming of the boat he should build on the bay.

CHAPTER XIII

LUIS came out of the hot marquee, and was at once surrounded by a flutter of soft muslin, trays of gay buttonholes, a ring of bright eyes and flushed cheeks, framed about by cobwebs of lace caps. He bought patiently for the fourth time, and moved on slowly through the chatter and press, the rich-coloured flowers in his hand emphasising his foreign air in the midst of the Northern English crowd.

The three days' bazaar was mounting its last wave of brilliant success. Mrs Garnett, with that happy instinct for weather which belongs to certain born organisers of *fêtes*, had plunged unerringly on the perfect heart of the summer, and would soon be figuring in the county paper as "that expert in socio-charitable functions, upon whom, as on Royalty, the heavens attend." She was in the tea-tent at the present moment, interesting various influential persons in the Home, cool-cheeked, cool-voiced, beautifully-gowned, extraordinarily sensible, charming and clear. Even Dick, moving clumsily in the background upon unnecessary errands, planking down spilt cups of tea in the wrong places, and bread-and-butter before clamourers for cake, could not detract from the *prestige* of her effect. She might have been a deputation direct from Providence itself, sent to demonstrate the latest scientific methods to the charitably-inclined.

It had certainly been a very kind bazaar. There were

few grudges to be laid up in lavender, few family friendships that had been set tottering by excitement and vanity and irregularity as to meals. The usual jealousies and antagonisms had been in most cases foreseen and provided against to the farthest possible degree; even,—this last strictly *in camera*—turned discreetly to account. Mrs Garnett knew the monetary value of general good temper, and, if she was not universally beloved, at least she had no open feuds. Born autocrats are not often to be found in violent dispute, simply because the idle world moves aside.

But it was in her association with Rowly that the secret of her triumph really lay. If she was the business-head, calculating, organising, minimising the chances of failure at every possible point, he was the soothing fountain of sympathy at which the thirsty proud might be assuaged, the ointment poured into the open wounds of strife, the run-hither-and-thither that carried everybody's grievance on its back. He bore the olive-branch between the floods. He smoked the peace-pipe in every camp. He was full of useless suggestions couched in the most appealing of terms. People said—"He's so sorry; he makes you ashamed of being vexed,"—and went meekly to buy the art-muslin which their neighbour's execrable taste preferred.

He had lived in a whirl of meetings, of letter-writing, of interviews right and left, of rushing back and forth to London and Witham, the strain of these excitements increasing as the heat strengthened and the days went on. He had seen his beautiful house turned upside down, his beautiful lawns worn by strange feet, and studded with monstrous tents. Fortune-tellers lurked in his rose-gardens; they were throwing bean-bags in the yew-alley, and among the rock-plants they were

trimming hats. The garage had been turned into a rifle-range, and the cars stood cracking their tyres in the unprotected yard. There was also every kind of diabolical ball game that led you lightly across the beds. Each new development had been a shock to him, more of a shock, indeed, than he knew, for he had hurried painfully on, never analysing his feelings, but feeling acutely, nevertheless. At times, he had gone into the Mauve Room, and had sat very still, staring at the happy monk in his sun-bathed cell, as if guessing at the secret of that stillness and peace which were yet neither idle nor useless nor to be condemned. And then the Mauve Room had been sacked and cleared, its treasures carried away or pushed aside, its atmosphere altered to that of the *café chantant*, the casual sketch, the so-called artistic side-shows of a big bazaar. There was a platform at one end, covered with Turkey red, upon which various persons mopped and mowed, or sang cheap ditties to the golden tones of his excellent grand. In times of peace, so to speak, nobody but Julian ever played the piano at Thorns, but that had not prevented Rowly from buying the best of its kind. The Lady of the House would have played, as a matter of course, so he told himself, in his simple mind, and at times had seemed to hear her in the very act. There were cane-bottomed chairs in tight, uncomfortable rows, sometimes covered with crumbs and silver paper and crushed programmes and the petals of dead flowers; but, after a little while, Rowly did not go into the Mauve Room again. He was glad that the happy monk was looking eternally the other way.

But everybody had been very kind—so he rebuked himself, in his thoughts. Luis had been no end of a help—handled all manner of jobs that you ought hardly

to have asked of a fellow with a career. Every spare moment when he wasn't down at the bay was at Rowly's service. Bill and Julian, too, had given him the whole of their time, and he had no right to feel lonely, to be conscious of pricking envy because Luis had his boat, and Bill and Julian seemed to have each other. The truth was, he wanted a rest, and would be wise to get away if—well, if he was allowed. Something would be sure to stop him, in any case. It always did. Lettice was already outlining some charitable orgy for September, encouraged by the polite interest of a person of influence. She turned to him for corroboration, from time to time, and he answered absently, watching the children from the Home gathered for tea at a long table in the middle of the tent. The sun peered through chinks in the canvas at the little faces and shining heads, and swept boldly in a narrowing wedge through the opening at the far end. He replied more and more at random, upsetting, quite unconsciously, some of Lettice's clearest propaganda and most telling facts; so that, when a fashionable female came in and dropped, half-fainting, into a chair, announcing that, bran-tub or no bran-tub, she must have tea or die, Rowly was sent to take her place. He went patiently, crossing the hot, crowded lawn from one stuffy tent to the other, besieged on all hands by commands to buy objects which, in many cases, were there for sale merely because he happened to have paid for them already, to take up his post behind a large barrel and a pair of tongs, forcing himself to the part of cheerful showman huckstering his wares.

The moving crush of bright frocks, slipping from the glare without to the comparative gloom within, fretted his brain like the shiver of a cinema on a sensitive eye.

The big stalls, rapidly emptying, had still their brilliant draperies and tinsel ornaments for show. He could hear the brass band down in the park and the singing from the house jarring together in an ecstasy of discord which seemed to revel in the result. It struck with vivid pain upon an ear that had grown, as Lettice had remarked, just a little deaf to voices close at hand. He could hear the rifle-shots, too, from the gallery in the garage, where Bill was in charge. Each clean little report, unnoticed by the chattering throng, sent a sharp quiver through his tired frame. He began to think that he could hear other sounds as well, blurred and very far away, but gradually and certainly always drawing nearer, the pattering of little hoofs along a gravel drive. . . .

He smiled kindly at the patrons of the bran-tub as they prodded and dug, feeling a little thrill of pleasure as each parcel rose into sight, gay with ribbons tied by Julian's hands. He was very grateful and polite when the tuppences were thrust into his hand, just as if he had indeed been the showman he played, instead of master and host, upon whose sufferance alone the whole gigantic nightmare was there at all. Once, he was dragged away to choose the dolls which he was to give to the children before they left, and went with infinite care along the beauty show of gaudy bodies and staring, glassy eyes, but when that was over he returned to his tub, as the malingering deserter did not re-appear. He stayed for a long time, until the barrel was empty, and his brain began to swim in slow, rocking waves, above the roll of which the patter of the hoofs was always plain. Then, at last, he pushed the canvas aside, and squirmed out, making his way unsteadily towards the house.

Meanwhile, Luis, escaping a bevy of muslins armed with ice-creams, emptied his pockets upon a water-colour that was being heavily raffled with a royal indifference to its worth, broke past the fortune-tellers' decoys, and firmly refused to trim a hat. He drew a breath of relief when he came out on the terrace above, free for the moment of the insistent crowd, still bathed in the shimmering gold of the heat, and turned with a look of longing towards the west, where the cool sea lay in wait, and the *Querida* was coming further into being on the wings of every hour. Ever since that first unintended visit, he had been continually down at the bay, learning from Huck and a little white-sailed hull the mysteries of its tidal river with its changing sands, its currents and shelving banks. On a full tide, with a friendly wind, they had raced across to Cunswick Fell, so that he might stand where, as tradition had it, the inanimate body of his troublesome forebear had lain. He had climbed the fell from the sloping shore, and watched for a long time the moving water at his feet; and, when he returned to the boat, Huck, sinner that he was, had chuckled and rejoiced, for he had seen in his eyes the look which, for many a long year, had troubled the heart of Gaspar Huddleston's wife.

He turned, at last, counting the hours to the morrow promised by the cloudless sky, and at that moment Julian passed beneath, in the snowy livery of the Bazaar. His hands were still full of the gorgeous flowers, and, as she looked up, conscious of someone on the bank, he loosed the contents of his fingers on her head, so that he startled her into a little cry.

"Shirking?" she called gaily, staying an instant below, the sun making living gold of her hair under the mesh of the lace cap.

"Oh, no! Superintending, that's all. Just going round to see that Bill is doing his share. You'd better come along and see if we can't catch him out."

She shook her head.

"There's a concert due very soon. I'm accompanist, and more or less in charge. And you won't find Bill off his pitch. Mother has trained him too well for that. I believe it's only an excuse for running away from your own."

"Well, I wasn't exactly wanted where I was. I wrapped up toys for Mrs Briggs until she threw me out. Legs and wheels sticking out of the paper on all sides, and half a ball of string somewhere round the lot. She almost beat me. Can't you take things easy for a minute or two, up here?"

"We'll all be taking it easy by this time to-morrow. I'm really glad that this is the last day. It seems too bad to make havoc of the place like this, and I'm sure Mr Huddleston is worn out. Do you happen to know where he is?"

"I'm afraid I haven't the ghost of an idea. You forget I've been suffering under Mrs Briggs. Any message for the virtuous Bill?"

"No, Yes. Yes, if you don't mind. Ask him to look for Rowly, and see if he can't persuade him to rest."

"I suppose I might volunteer for that, myself." He spoke rather stiffly, and she looked distressed.

"Of course. I beg your pardon. I wish you would see what you can do."

He made her his formal bow, and turned away after a quick look over the lawn, but almost at once a servant informed him that the master had entered the house, and he followed leisurely, going round by the stable-

yard. He felt annoyed without exactly knowing why, except that Julian seemed again to be holding him responsible for something to which he had no clue, and was further irritated when Bill, detaching himself hastily from his post, repeated her question with his first breath.

"Somewhere in the house, so I've been told. I'm just about to follow him up."

"That's good—to know he's out of the heat. Make him take it easy, if you can."

"Miss Garnett sent me on the same errand. Any need, do you suppose, for such concern? He isn't an invalid now, you know, though I daresay he can do with a rest."

"He's not as strong as he was, and he's had a terribly hard month. Besides, all this upset frets him like the deuce. A little spoiling won't do him any harm. His nerves aren't what they used to be, either, and he gets fearfully down on his luck. He's missed you a bit when you've been off sailing, and I fancy he has worried, too. After all, he's had a lonely sort of life, and he takes things too hard to live over long. Coddle him a bit—*now*. Some day, I believe you'll be glad."

Rowly was in the library and fast asleep, a thin, curled figure in a cavernous arm-chair, his lips parted and every muscle relaxed. His smooth hair was very thin on the top, and beside the hollow temples it was white. His well-shaped hands hung loosely over the chair-arm. He was so weary and so sound asleep that even they, those last signallers of nervous strain, had gone off duty for the time.

Luis went in with his silent step, congratulating himself upon having first paused at the door, but he had barely come to a halt before his brother sat up

with a sharp jerk, collecting his wits with an effort that was painful even to see.

"Wanting me, are they, for those dolls? Of course . . . yes, yes . . . I shouldn't have come away. Don't say I'm too late. I'd counted on giving those toys myself. Such jolly little kids—I'd have liked to have seen them smile. I must have been a bit sleepy with the heat, but I'm all right now, if it isn't too late."

"It is only half-past five." Luis chose a chair with grave deliberation, and sat down between him and the door. "Your presentation isn't until six o'clock, so you need not run away yet. I have been commissioned to see that you keep quiet."

"Lettice?" Rowly looked up quickly, and then down with a rising flush, as if in apology for the presumptuous thought. "Very kind, I'm sure. Everybody's very kind." He was sitting on the edge of his chair, with his head bent, and his hands hanging between his knees. "I'm all right, you know—just a little bit dull; but I've had no end of a jolly sleep."

"I'm sorry I disturbed you, coming in like that. I wish you'd make another attempt. If I worry you, I can sit on the mat."

"Oh, my dear fellow! . . . Really, you know! . . ."

Rowly was genuinely shocked. "And you here to be put upon your feet, and all that! I hope you haven't been neglected during all this rush. Six o'clock, did you say?—yes, of course. I think I'd better be getting back."

"Not yet. I've orders to see that you stay and rest."

"Orders? Little Julian, I suppose? Not . . . ? No, no. As a matter of fact, I haven't any business to be here at all. Answering questions, you know—that's my job. That is why I must be on the spot."

It doesn't much matter about the replies, as long as they get the questions off their chests. Stall-holders and entertainers, newspaper-men and the band—they must have somebody they can pin down. Makes things so much jollier all round. They'll worry Lettice if I don't turn out, and of course I can't have that. Ungentlemanly, you know, to let a lady be bothered in your own house."

"It isn't your own house, at the present moment. More like an imitation Zoo."

Rowly's face crinkled sharply into pain.

"It's quite too ridiculous to mind, but it really *hurts*! That turf, you know, with the poles and the holes—it's—it's a *crime*. I once stayed with people who were letting turf run wild which had taken hundreds of years to grow, and I thought they ought to be hanged. *Wanted* it like that, if you could possibly believe! I said it was very jolly, and came away at once. Hosts, you know, so of course one must. And now I'm doing something nearly as bad myself, but Lettice thought it would be a draw. The Mauve Room, too; looks so well on the poster, you see. A wonderful woman—so sensible, you know. Reminded me I meant doing up the Room, in any case, as of course I was. I got Crane to send for patterns from town." He turned in his chair, looking wistfully at a parcel, labelled "Liberty," on a table near, and then back again, doubtfully, at his brother's face. "Jolly things, you know—Liberty patterns. Would you care to have a look? Of course not . . . childish . . . got a career. Besides, I ought to be getting back."

"Not yet." Luis spoke with a touch of impatience in his tone. "There is no real reason why you should ever go back, if it comes to that. You're riding

your own kind heart to its death, and that's the truth ! ”

“ Can't refuse people, you know.” Rowly looked down at his fingers, twisted nervously together. “ Life's so short, and there's so much to be done, and sometimes there's only an awful ass to do it. It's worth while, though, if only to show other people how much better they could do it if they tried. The start's the thing. The old has-beens at the bottom of the ladder don't count. Anyhow, we've made things jollier for those who are going up higher.”

“ But it is all so small ! ” Luis broke out, his irritation getting the upper hand at last. “ It's such a trivial round. Somebody has to run your absurd little county, I suppose, but there is no need to break yourself on the wheel. Half the time it is just a chatter of useless talk, and driving there and coming back again. You don't think it is life, do you—this petty routine to which you pay an eternal sacrifice of horseflesh and rubber tyres ? And then, your charities—which are worse. What will this affair of to-day have cost you, for example, not only in actual dilapidations and cash, but in the strain on yourself, loss of appetite and sleep and general lack of peace ? And what do you get out of it all ? Of course, you know best as to that, but, as far as I can see, it is little more than casual thanks and the first offer the next time a tiresome job comes along. They put on you all round, and you neither resent it nor resist. You like it, I believe—I'm almost afraid that you're proud ; but I think it makes me slightly ashamed. It hurts me to see my brother going so cheap. You've lived so long in this narrow groove that you have lost your sense of proportion, forgotten its proper place in the general scheme, and in consequence your narrow

little groove is squeezing you into a narrow little grave, ever so many years before your time, before you've seen the world as it really is, or grasped in any sense the things it has to give. Now I want you to promise to shelve your county work for a while, together with that ladylike vampire outside, and come abroad with me for a long rest. I can make things interesting for you, if you will give me the honour of showing you round. I know a good many people whom you might care to meet. For God's sake, old man, before it is too late, throw up this ridiculous altruism, and give yourself a chance ! ”

There was a long pause after his long speech, while Rowly sat gazing at the floor, only his drooping hands, working one within the other, giving any sign of life. He was urging his lagging brain to follow his brother's words, that clever brother who had seen and done so much, and was going to see and do ever so much more ; who was young and handsome and popular and travelled, and must of course be wiser than a middle-aged stay-at-home like himself, who had got nothing—nothing at all—out of his fifty-odd years of life. He went through the impatient speech patiently, through the hard names shrinkingly but bravely, trying to be tolerant and just, even though they struck him over the heart. He had never had much opinion of himself and his achievements, and this final depreciation left him staring at both with a vacant wonder, as at something at which even God must laugh. His vague, unanalysed hopes that something of what he had called his work would one day blossom and fruit, died before his eyes. His cup of comfort—that the little love he had gathered on his way had made it all worth while—was lightly emptied of its scanty store. His brother was ashamed of him ;

his patrician brother said that he made himself cheap. His feeling for his fellow-men was "ridiculous altruism," his love for his county merely "absurd." The passion of his life was transformed from a gracious ideal into a monstrosity, gloating over him with brooding wings. This was how Luis saw him and his surroundings, his work, his hopes, his adorations, sacrifices, and rewards. Trivial, every one of them. Out of them all there was not one single pearl of price fit to lay before any throne.

"Very kind!" he murmured, at length, still without looking up. "Can't think why you should want to be bothered by such an ass. But one has to go on as one has begun. One doesn't realise things until it's too late, and then it's no use getting upset. I'm awfully sorry if I've let you down in any way. It must feel rotten to be ashamed of one's own brother; you see, that's never happened to me. John and Tom were such fine lads; and then there's you, with your looks and your career. If only we'd known each other a bit earlier and a bit better, you could have kept me up to the mark, and prevented me giving myself away, but it's too late now, as I said. You see, I'm getting rather old . . . don't you think I'd better be trotting along? I shouldn't like to miss those dolls."

He got to his feet uncertainly, and stood looking at his brother, but Luis would not meet his eyes. He took a few steps across the room towards the Liberty parcel, and then halted again, looking back. He waited a few minutes with a harassed expression on his face, as if seeking for the right words of a parting speech that would leave things comfortable and jolly once more. Twice he took his watch out of his pocket, and stared at it without seeing it in the very least, and still Luis did not move. Then, very slowly, with one last, hungry

glance that lingered unhappily from the parcel to the dark, averted head, he went out with a dragging step, leaving the door ajar, as if in the faint hope of being recalled.

The children were drawn up on the lawn by the time he arrived, and presently, before an admiring crowd, he went the round with his arms full of tow heads and many-coloured skirts. The little ones knew him, and grasped at the toys with exclamations and cries, together with wide-eyed smiles for himself. He talked a great deal as he hurried about, seeming, indeed, even more chatty than was his wont, perhaps because of that moment when he had stood, helplessly dumb, at the library door. When the ceremony was over, and the big wagonettes had clattered away down the park, one of those people who are always in the know drew him aside to hint that there would be a by-election before long. He had various candidates to suggest, including—so Rowly's numbing brain gathered, at last—the speaker himself. The master of the house dragged at the heels of his impassioned speech for a period that seemed to have no probable end, now and then breaking free to shake countless hands, to murmur smiling good-byes and slam carriage-doors, but always, faithfully, he went back. With an election in view, there would be no chance to get away—not that he had ever really thought of going, of course. As Chairman of the Conservative Association, he must be on the spot, even although it was all absurd, as Luis had said. And after long hours, Lettice came up and took him away to talk about her new project for somebody else's good.

Luis was left alone to review his observations in a divided spirit of shame and amaze. He had been sent

to "spoil" Rowly, to take care of him in spite of himself with firmness and tact, and instead he had been brutally outspoken and decidedly unkind. To do him justice, he did not in the least understand how it had come about. He had started ingenuously enough, with any amount of earnest good-will, which had swamped suddenly in a wave of contempt. Rowly's narrow and childish talk, his fads and follies, his servility to Lettice, his readiness to be county catspaw and drudge, with his house the dumping-ground of everybody's good works, had focussed into a single impression, irritating him beyond control. He regretted his words, thinking back, and remembering how stricken Rowly had looked, how small and grey and pitiful and thin, but his very lack of resentment, his attitude of apology for being what he was, had militated against his brother's remorse. Perhaps, though he did not know it, Luis was really striking at the intangible presence in whose shadow Rowly seemed to walk. Perhaps Julian's solicitude, always urgent on the elder man's behalf, was responsible for the sudden flash of scorn.

He slipped out at the back, and went up the fell, struggling with the emotions thus unleashed. He passed the farm without attempting to look in, and climbed above to an overhanging spur. The bracken was thick and green on all sides, and cradled him as he lay on the steep slope, cooling his eyes on the misty line that he knew to be the sea. Below him, the June evening drew upon itself its vesture of purple and gold. The house at his feet sent up an unwavering column of delicate smoke which seemed to measure itself against the towering fell. He could hear the cars rolling down the park, and now and again glimpsed one between the trees. The tents and the thinning crowd were hidden

from him by the Hall, but the last efforts of the band came to him as faint trumpet-calls of eve. Presently, they, too, died away, and a last carriage rumbled the players down the drive, the level sun glinting on uniform and horn. Then all the gold went out of the evening's robe. The sun set, and over all the land was the one purple velvet garment of the dusk. He roused himself then, feeling cool and braced, and went briskly down to the house.

It seemed extraordinarily quiet as he went in. All the doors were open, and a cool air that was not big enough for a breeze wandered through the hall and up the stair, freshening every passage and room, and stilling the feverish vibrations of the day. The Cocker lay stretched, asleep, at the hall door, a very black shadow among the little grey ones that were creeping into place on every side. The scent of the flowers in the borders and on the lawns drove through the house in a great current of clean, warm sweetness and strength, perfumed, so it seemed, not only every nook and cranny, but one's whole essence and breath. Every draught of it was a delight, and the cool, steady hands of the night bound themselves about tired brows.

Crane appeared silently, tray in hand, from behind the baize door. For a moment, as he swung it wide, showing the long, faint glimmer of the corridor behind, there entered distant laughter and chatter from the servants' hall. Supper was laid in the library to-night, so he informed Luis. He would find Mr and Mrs Garnett there, waiting for their car. Mr William, he believed, was still outside. The man looked very tired, but his tone was curiously quiet—gentle, even, Luis noticed, with surprise. - Not a hint of antagonism fluttered the tender, dusky air. He went on again with his tray,

and Luis turned slowly to follow, but stopped in passing at the drawing-room door.

Julian was there, standing by the piano, gathering the music into careful heaps. The encroaching darkness was beginning to lay merciful hands upon the total dishevelment of the room. In its shadow the Turkey red and the mauve lay down together like the lion and the lamb. The dim array of cane chairs had an immobile yet attentive air, as if momentarily expecting to be taken away. All the windows were still flung wide, so that the full glamour of the garden floated in on the wings of the same disturbing sweetness filling the hall. Julian's white figure looked ghostlike in the empty, shadowed room, as her hands moved silently over the sheets. Here and there, a gilded frame glimmered suddenly through the dusk, and Luis had a fancy that, in just such fashion, the gold of her hair shone dimly on the wall behind.

She saw him as she finished the neat pile, and he went in and across and up the platform steps. To her, he, too, looked somewhat unreal, with his dark, still face, and his hushed, elastic step. They stood at either side of the piano, opposite the open door, so that anyone passing could see them standing there, and hear what they said. Now that he was near to her, close to the delicate pallor of her cheek, she seemed more distant than before, while in her eyes was the mixture of fear and dislike with which they had met him at the very first. She folded her hands on the music, and leaned across.

"What have you done to Rowly?" she asked, without greeting or preface. "It must have been you—there was no one else. What did you do to him, this afternoon?"

He stared at her dumbly for a moment, infinitely surprised. In the sunset ceremonial on the fell and the enveloping peace of the night, his burst of irritation had been completely blotted out. She went on quickly before he could speak, all of her ghostly but her accusing lips and the condemnation in her eyes.

"I asked you to take care of him—Bill, too, so he says—oh, you don't know how badly he needs care!—and instead of that . . . what was it that you did? You were with him some time, and when he came out he looked stunned and stupid and a little blind. But you know how he looked, of course. I needn't tell you that. You couldn't have quarrelled with him, I suppose? Surely nobody could quarrel with him, *now*?"

Luis lifted his head, feeling a puzzled anger wake and stir. As usual, she was harping upon Rowly, as if the latter's depression and failing health were somehow due to himself. The womanly tenderness that he had at first admired was beginning to get on his nerves. She carried her attitude too far. Bill, too. There was something morbid about this everlasting concern.

"Don't you think you imagine things, sometimes?" he asked, as lightly as he could. "Rowly overdoes his strength, I know, and of course he is tired, after all these strenuous days, but he is not at the end of things, as you seem to think."

She shivered suddenly, as if the soft air circling round her head had held an icy breath from the snows.

"You won't tell me what you did?"

"I did nothing, but I admit that I said a good deal! I'm afraid I even lost my temper, and told him he was absurd. It was not the right time, of course, when he was so tired and rushed, but there never *is* a right time with Rowly, as you know."

"How could you . . . call him absurd?" There was amazement in her voice as well as rebuke, as if she had found him flinging mud at a saint.

His annoyance increased.

"I happen to be his brother, you see. I considered that he deserved it, for once. All this sociological and benevolent fury is too much for him, and it is time it came to an end. It is certainly not worth the sacrifice of his life. In the scheme of things it won't count a rap."

"You told him that?" She laughed miserably. "Oh, the poor dear!"

"Hard-hitting, you think? But it *does* seem to me absurd—Quixote on the windmill, beating the air. Why can't he go at things more slowly, less as if he were being driven? I can't see that anybody would be a penny the worse, even Mrs Garnett. I don't want to be discourteous, but she does rush him, you know. Why, for instance, should he have been saddled with all this affair? Of course he likes being at her beck and call—I don't dispute that—just as he likes to think that he is doing good all round. The trouble is that he goes too far. He has put on the pace since I came; even I can see that. It is becoming a sort of mania that he hasn't the will to fight, and that will end by killing him before his time."

She made a quick movement of helpless despair.

"Oh, if only you knew! *You* to condemn him, with your egotism and conceit! Can't you see how he has thought for you and guarded you, and kept his troubles to himself, even to-day when you turned on him for no reason at all? Oh, I hope you will remember, when your own turn comes. . . ."

He stared at her, too interested to make further

defence. On the fringe of the puzzle light was showing, at last.

"What is it?" he asked, determined now to get at the truth. "Tell me plainly what you mean. What is it that you all seem to know except myself?"

"You ought to know the story of your own race. If you had really belonged, or really cared, you would have found out, long before now. The family history is nothing to you, just as Rowly is nothing. But when your own time comes to face the sheep——"

"The sheep?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, you won't believe, even though you have seen them for yourself. When the sheep come down from the fell, it's to warn the master of death, and since the day you came they've been twice—when the horses ran away, and the night the specialist was here. And Rowly's still alive . . . only afraid . . . dreadfully afraid. . . ."

"But surely you can't expect me to believe all that!" He spoke tolerantly, half-inclined to laugh, yet stirred by the amazing passion of her tone, and saw her beat her hands against the wood.

"If you would try to realise what it means! Mother doesn't believe, either, but the rest of us . . . oh, I don't know. How *can* we know? It's merely tradition for most of us, though some of the older folk have seen it before, Rowly himself among them. He gave orders at once that you were not to be told, right at the first when he was still reeling from the shock. He took endless precautions, hedged you round on every side, and always when you left him he fretted himself ill for fear you should get to know. He thought you might feel you had brought him death in your hand. You see, it's part of the Spanish curse to be afraid

of the sheep. You were ill, too, and he wanted you to have every chance. He thought of you, all the time.

"And then he set to work to do what he could for everybody else, for the tenants, for the county, for Mother . . . anybody who asked. He gives himself right and left because there is no need to save himself any more. He hurries because he feels he can't do enough in the time. Every morning he wonders whether he will live till night, and every night he wonders whether he will see the dawn. It's a living death . . . purgatory . . . and worse. Whether it's true or not, it's all that. And all the while he smiles, and speaks kindly, and considers others first, while you think him absurd, and tell him that he is nothing and no use—you, whom he has tried so hard to spare! He wanted your sympathy, too. He wanted all the help he could get, but he did without it rather than that you should be hurt. But it isn't fair that he should suffer more than he need. It is more than time that you should know the truth."

A grey figure came up in the tall frame of the door. Rowly himself looked in across the dusk.

"Your parents are leaving, Julian—waiting for the car. I'm afraid your mother is very tired. I didn't know you were here, or I'd have brought you some supper myself. What do you say to some egg-flip with a dash of sherry and all that? You could drink it as you go. My dear—you haven't forgotten your promise of last year?"

She turned towards him. Her voice trembled as she spoke.

"No, I did not forget, but I have broken it, nevertheless. It wasn't right that you should have so

much to bear, and his unkindness as well! He knows now—what he ought to have known, long ago."

There was a pause, and then Rowly said, in a meditative tone of faint surprise—

"My little Julian to lay a burden on a man's soul! I trusted you most because I thought you loved me most, except, perhaps, my good fellow, Crane. But perhaps you forgot about loving me, just then. Of course, it's so jolly easy to forget." He turned a little in the door. "Crane—are you there—my good Crane? Is it so jolly easy to forget?"

A blacker figure grew behind him, with a calm, white face, and they melted out again into the hall. Julian stood a moment longer, and then turned to gather the music in her arms, only to let it drop back. Her head drooped in her hands, and Luis heard her sob. He moved quickly to her side.

"Please listen to me . . . do listen . . . you were quite right! I am glad you told me. If only you had done it before! Of course I ought to have known—it was absurd to try to keep it back—but at least you won't blame me now for seeing things in so different a light?"

She shook her head without lifting it.

"I was angry. You seemed so hard. And now it is spoilt . . . gone for nothing . . . all his trouble and care. I didn't mean to hurt you—ah, but yes, I did!"

"How have you hurt me? You don't suppose I believe such a fable as this? I daresay there is an old tale, but there can't be anything more. Come, you must try to laugh it down, and to make Rowly laugh, too. I have wondered always why you have looked at me as

if I had committed a crime. I suppose you felt that I was responsible, in a way, almost as if I were pushing Rowly out of the place. Well, as you said, it will be my turn next!" He laughed cheerfully, and she uttered a little, protesting cry, at which he put out his hand and very lightly touched hers. "You know, the only hurt you have done me is to look at me—as I said. It *did* hurt, I confess, when I was under the weather, and rather lonely and strange. I wish you would take it back—blot it out. Look at me once as you look at a friend."

He was very near her, bent on driving out remorse, his voice, dropping by degrees, full of persuasive cadences and southern, caressing notes. Something stirred about them that belonged to a more passionate and splendid clime. She raised her head at last, and met his eyes in the dusk, the blue of her own dark with her shed tears. She saw him now—in the half-light where she hardly saw him at all—as if for the first time. She had struck at this man in her pity for another, and the blow had opened a door in her own heart. The look she gave him was pathetic because it did not know what it gave. The waves of perfume on which they breathed eddied back and forth.

More figures were moving in the hall, and a car came round on a drowsy hum, as if it, like the land, were already half-asleep. Somebody—it was Arthur's voice—uttered a half-shout that was instantly stilled. Julian moved with a quick sigh, and went down the platform steps, Luis, carrying the music, behind.

A little crowd was gathered at the hall-door, still aglimmer with the purple light that would never fade all night long. Rowly was in the centre of the group, with Lettice at one hand and Dick at the other. Bill

was on the steps, with a wrap flung over his arm. Crane stood beside the car, a featureless study in black and white. Arthur was down on the drive, his face turned to the lawns below, where the big tents stood up greyly, like monster-moths with drooped and folded wings. Round the corner of the house, the other men-servants peered, motionless and dumb. Through the baize door of the hall, the cambric of women's caps, starring the gloom, showed where the maids stood huddled, side by side. The Cocker still lay on the top step, with his inky nose stretched on his inky paws.

Under the same hushing spell, the two from the Mauve Room melted into the circle round the door. Rowly stirred when Julian came up behind, and drew her hand through his arm. Dick turned his eyes as Luis appeared at his side, but he did not speak. There was no attempt to send him back, or to ignore the cause of that accumulated quiet. There was no reason now why he should not look, where they were all looking, with open eyes.

They were moving between the tents, over the dim lawns, and along the shadowed hollows of the park, through the rose-gardens, where the flower-heads were heavy with dew, and the lavender-walk that brushed their sides as they went by. On both hands they were coming from the fell, without hurry, yet without pause, on little, firm, light hoofs, to cluster opposite the silent house. They did not bend their heads to crop the sweet, wet turf, or lift a single cry into the imperturbable night. They came into being like slow-moving figures on a darkened screen, the snowy backs of the new-clipped mothers and the little, trotting bodies of the lambs.

It was Mrs Garnett who moved first, with a tiny,

contemptuous shrug, as if even she, caught for the moment by the prevailing belief, was too exhausted to protest. She went down to the car without so much as a backward look, and Crane settled the rug across her knees. Rowly pressed Julian's hand, urging her gently forward as Bill folded her in the wrap, but she did not move. Dick muttered something in a low growl, at which Rowly shook his head with a meaning insistent and quite defined, and the slow man gave him a grip of the hand, and drew his daughter away. Only Bill remained, looking up at the grey figure in the door, that was so rapidly growing one with the shadows behind, yet whose dignity at this strange moment held all obedient and still. In the young man's face was the hint of a smile, something of the look which angels wear before the courage of a dying bed. Perhaps he was trying, as surely they try, to infuse a little of that exaltation into the passing soul. Then he turned and followed the rest.

The car dropped away on the same sleepy note to the outer twilight of the park, and was lost at last behind the curtain of the night. Arthur had disappeared round the end of the house. Crane came rigidly up the steps, and at the sight of him the baize door was hurriedly closed. Still the two brothers stood together without look or word. The sheep were nearer now, coming up into the drive itself, all over the drive, pressing close to the house, to the very foot of the steps, looking up at the master in the shadows beyond. There was nothing about them to terrify or repel, either in the patient melancholy of the ewes or the innocent, wide-eyed wonder of the lambs. Crane made a move as if to close the door, but Rowly stopped him with a glance. Then he went quietly across the hall, and up

the carved stair, followed by the Cocker, with little, sleepy steps, to his pleasant room full of cool airs and floating garden scents.

And all night long the door stood open wide, for that which would to enter, unopposed.

CHAPTER XIV

LUIS stood at his window, gazing up at the dim, looming temple that was the fell. As a rule, it was alive with vague presences, real if unseen, and the mournful voices of the flock. To-night, nothing called from the precipices or crouched amongst the fern. There were no owls hooting round the windows of the ancient farm; no bats circled and dipped in the park; no alert sheep-dogs, stabled for the night, warned each other across the land. The house about him and beneath his feet was absolutely still, even from that strange talk that fills the unwatched hours. He himself was still under the domination of the enveloping calm which had fallen over spirit and frame alike in the shadow-drama of the hall. Already he had stood for more than an hour by the flung-up sash, every muscle gently relaxed, even his breathing faint and very slow. His brain, too, though it moved continuously round the events of the day, like a wrestler seeking a chance to close, never seriously tried to take hold. Indeed, it came to him, after a while, that he was not really thinking at all. He was waiting, just as everything about him was waiting, especially that extraordinary muteness on the fell.

Yet there was nothing morbid in the silence, nothing death-like or strained, nothing at which either the heart or the nerves need take fright. Nor was it hypnotic, anæsthetising the faculties and binding the soul.

It had, on the contrary, an effect of conscious, superlative tranquillity, of erasing doubt and dismissing fear, so that from the great arms of its content the spirit looked at the wonder of the universe, and was exalted without effort, enlarged without pain. Luis remembered that winter evening, when, as he had thought, tumultuous panic had almost harried Rowly to his death. Would he sink to-night in this infinite, calm sea of exquisite, transcendental peace?

His own hard words to his brother seemed meaningless as words remembered after long years, as if Rowly were already out of reach of the power of the tongue. If brutal, they had nevertheless been more or less true, spoken in the ordinary world of ordinary things; but this plane to which he was swung was not the ordinary world. On this plane you could believe that a man might read his sentence elsewhere than in a doctor's eyes; that a dumb, domestic beast could indeed be the messenger of death. Even with a foot in either world, you could believe that and a host of similar things, though the odds were you would be horribly afraid; but, wholly on this plane, you could believe and not be afraid at all. Rowly had suffered cruelly, hanging over the abyss, but at last he was across. How long, Luis wondered, would he himself shiver on the brink?

The fantastic thoughts appeared born of themselves, not of any effort of the brain, but they seemed very illuminating and clear, like the impossible, reasonless sentences we speak so loudly in our dreams. Nothing from the world of flesh and blood either clogged their succession or flourished the laws of commonplace and common sense. Only, at times, a vision of Julian, with that unexpected dawn in her tearful eyes, linked

him by a rope of perfume to things human and understood.

Suddenly, he fell fast asleep, standing upright by the cushioned seat. From his waking state, where his mind, ineffably serene, seemed to be freed from his physical self, he passed in his dreams to a full consciousness of bodily struggle, of personal trouble and discomfort and dread. He swayed in an invisible boat shaken and struck by the waves, as if the water had been a concrete substance instead of a yielding element beneath her keel, and in the torment of the ship he, too, was battered and suffered shock, as the shudders and thrills of her straining planks drove upwards from his feet. The wet rope to which he clung bit into his fingers with salted teeth. The enveloping, screaming, senseless wind dragged at him from behind, as if eternally sworn to break his clutch, or flung him, pinned, against the reeling mast. There was water under the deck that he dared not stir to bale because of the monstrous enemy stooping ready to snatch. It surged and swayed, gurgling and slapping at his knees, and the boat wallowed, lay over on her side. He could see nothing anywhere, not even the maddened, drowning hulk which still contrived to hold him safe. Blinded thus, all his consciousness was centred in his physical distress, the awful, human piteousness of the boat, the combined lashing horror of wind and wave, that struck and struck and struck again, determined to make an end. . . .

He returned as suddenly as he had gone. Gasping and trembling, he was yet aware that he had been recalled by that single instant, preceding events, in which the brain leaps fully awake without apparent cause. And then he heard the telephone-bell ring in the library below.

Collecting himself, he opened his door very quietly, and saw Crane coming towards him, but without hurry or alarm. His haggard face was no longer a mask, but altogether human and kind. He looked frankly at Luis as he approached.

"I'm glad you're up, sir. I somehow thought you wouldn't be in bed. The master's asking for you, if you don't mind. He wouldn't let me trouble you before, but I think he wants to see you now. I'm afraid he's going very fast."

"The doctor?" Luis asked, his voice difficult and hoarse, as if the very futility of the question held it back. Not the least extraordinary point of this extraordinary affair was the acceptance of the fact that a man, still far from old, and without definite injury or disease, should yet pass swiftly away under their very eyes.

"I've sent for him, sir. You must have heard me ringing off. He was at home and in bed, but he's coming over at once. It's better he should be here, though it isn't any use."

"Can he speak—my brother, I mean? He's conscious, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Weaker, of course, but he's very anxious to talk. Been muttering to himself for some time, and now he's asked for you. Somehow I've an idea he was kind of rehearsing what he meant to say. You'll excuse me, sir, but he admires you that much, he doesn't like to be caught out. A bit afraid you'll look down on him, you know, you having been abroad and seeing such a lot. And then, he's had to keep such a watch on himself, all these months, he'll hardly know where to begin. He's always been one to chatter straight on, just as it came into his head. To have to stop before

he spoke, and listen to himself, and always be on the look-out—why, I can't help thinking it must have come harder to him than most."

Hard for him, indeed; but, to others, ironically pathetic, that of this particular man this particular sacrifice should have been asked; that one who had nothing to hide, nothing in his life that the whole world might not know, had yet been forced to seal this terrible chamber in his mind. Expansive by nature, emotionally ready to give and to receive, immensely dependent upon sympathy and help, he had nevertheless shut himself off at the very moment when his personal demands were crying their loudest need. He had done it instantly, too—and willingly; and though he had wavered once, he had never really gone back on his resolve. At a time when his will-power was weakened by shock, he had learned to defend his most vulnerable points. The affectionate little man had borne to be misjudged. The chatterer had learned to hold his tongue.

The lamps in the room were unlit, but a night-light burned in a Ruskin saucer by the bed. All the hangings of the room were blue, the della Robbia blue that is essentially happy and clean, the colour of the simple-souled and the kind, the child-lover and the smiling heart. The long curtains before the open panes were only partly drawn, and now and again billowed ever so slightly in their folds, like soft, blue sails taking a capful of wind that only they could discern. A white rose-tree in a blue pot stood on a table across the room, looking like a cluster of white blossom suspended starrily in space. The Cocker was stretched on the floor at the bed-foot. Above the blue silk coverlet, all that could be seen of Rowly was his thin, hollow-templed face, and one of the nervous hands that had the fingers

peaceably closed. Crane set a chair by the bed, and retreated to the exact spot from which his presence could be felt, but could in no way restrict or disturb. And at once Rowly began to talk.

"Sorry to bother you, old man! Hard day, you know, tying up parcels and hanging round to be used. Three hard days . . . should be in bed and asleep. Shame. Too bad. But there's something I want to say—just two or three words. Couldn't explain, this afternoon; couldn't even talk sense; but I think I might frame a bit better now, if you don't mind."

His voice, worn to the merest thread, thin as a whistle though perfectly clear, struck his brother with amaze, in so short a time had it changed, drawn to itself the unmistakable symptom of decay. It was plain to Luis that the humanity before him was even now loosing its tenant from its walls of clay. The transcendental ecstasy died down, leaving him conscious that they were man and man, closely akin, and that, without petition on one side and forgiveness on the other, it would be unbearable to part.

"I was unjust . . . impertinent . . . I had no right to judge. I did not know your motives—how could I?—I could only look at things from outside. I wanted to hit out, I don't know why, and you happened to be there. But it was largely because I cared that you should not go to waste. I wish—I wish I had told you that."

"Yes." A look of pleasure came over the other's face. "I should have liked to have understood that!"

"I was puzzled, too,—had been, since I came. People looked at me with accusing eyes, and I did not

know why. Oh, no, they did not speak, but I saw there was something they would like to say, if they were allowed. They seemed to hate me, sometimes, especially Crane and . . . Crane, of course, went rather to extremes. Oh, yes, he knows I know. It is all right. Why didn't you tell me, old man? I could have helped."

"Oh, I could hardly have done that, you know, with you so jolly seedy and down on your luck. It would have looked like accusing you of bringing it along. Guest, you see . . . oh, no. So I asked everybody to keep quiet, as a favour to myself; in fact, I was really rather firm. One must, sometimes. You were always talking of going back, and I couldn't have you worried for nothing at all. There didn't seem any reason why you should ever know."

"It would not have worried me one hour. I could have kept you from worrying, too."

"You've a strong will . . . character, you know—can stand up to things and all that; perhaps it wouldn't have done you any harm. You could have told me not to be an ass—that would have helped a lot—but I didn't feel justified in taking the risk. I've never been brave enough to take risks for other people, just off my own bat. I was like that with Lettice. We were engaged once, just for a day, though perhaps she wouldn't like me to mention it, now. I thought she'd suffer, you see. People do suffer when they care a good deal, and I didn't think it fair, so I gave her up. You know, she *might* have suffered if she'd believed,—looking out and dreading and all that; not that I should have been worth it—conceited ass! I don't say everybody should do it—give up, of course. The others didn't, or we shouldn't be here, but it was like that for

me. I'd seen my mother when my father's time came, though he was lucky and went very quick. All the same, I never bothered about myself until it was actually here, and then I seemed to go completely to bits. Ridiculous, of course. Poor-spirited, very. But I was horribly afraid."

"I could have kept you from being afraid."

"I used to wonder if you could. It would have made things so much jollier for a coward like me, having you to talk to, and lean on, and all that. I was tempted no end, sometimes, but then, it might have been the other way about. You'd a career, too. I had to think of your peace of mind, and I was terribly torn in twain. I wanted you near me, you see, and yet I felt you ought to go. Rottenly selfish, of course, but there it is. Why, I'm even brute enough to be glad that little Julian broke her word, because now I can tell you things as they are. The work, you know—the meetings and the charities and all that—of course it's all trivial to you, but it's not absolute waste. There are a few people who think quite a lot of me—you've no idea!—only I couldn't remember them, just at the time. It all seemed so small, as you said. I've a crowd of kind letters somewhere, that I keep to read again, though of course I never do. Time, you know; and then it seems rather vain. But there'll be things about me in the papers when I'm dead. Perhaps you'll see I had a point or two, after all. They'll send police, I expect, to walk in front, and all the farmers will be there, and a few others that I know, and some of them will say I was a friend. Perhaps you won't be ashamed when you see the wreaths and testimonials and things. It seems so jolly rotten you should have to be ashamed."

Luis sank his head in his hands. He gave a short laugh that was levelled at his own incredible speech.

"*Gran Dios!* Forget it. It was not said."

Rowly turned slightly on his pillow, and sighed, and Crane came up, glass in hand. The sick man drank a little, and lay silent for a while. He seemed to be marshalling his thoughts into the paths by which alone they could hope to reach the end in time.

"I didn't care for county work, at first. I thought it dull and dry and limited—like you. Somewhere, I've got the Spanish touch in me, just a touch. Not the charm and the beauty and the brain and all that, but just the longing to be up and off. Such a jolly lovely world, you know, and I've seen none of it, as you said. I was just on the point of going abroad for a long tour when our father died, and I had to stop at home and take things in hand, and, by the time they were straightened out, I'd begun to think. I remembered Gaspar and the tales, and I didn't want to be like that. I might have been, you know. Even though I'm not a Spanish Huddleston, I could have been a little bit like that. It seemed to me that I must tie myself down, so I went for the meetings and all the rest, and let them have me, body and soul. Of course, they grew, every year, but I had come to think I was wanted, and that helped me through. I cared for the place, too, and the people round, and I couldn't have left them if I'd tried. It was only now and then that I wanted other things—blue sky and warm sun when it was grey and cold, palaces and orange-groves, and things like that. I've always been soft about the cold, and I used to ache for the South, at times. But I'd my pictures, you

know, those jolly things downstairs, and after a while I made a palace of my own. We made a palace where I could forget to ache—Crane and Messrs Liberty and I."

Crane moved again, conjuring a parcel out of the gloom. A smile came on Rowly's face as he approached.

"Turn them out, Crane. I should like to see them, just once; they are always so jolly nice. Mr Luis won't mind, now I've explained. He knows I had to be tied down."

Crane lighted the lamp by the bedside with fingers perfectly steady and deft. The ring of flame came over the sick man's face, so that he flinched and shut his eyes, but opened them again at the touch of the silks with a smiling, eager look. Lying with his cheek against the whiteness of the pillow, he stole his weak hand over the patterns, praising this, pondering that, discarding them, one by one, until the bed was littered from side to side. He talked all the time, murmuringly, with constant reference to the Lady of the House, while Crane stood stiffly by the head of the bed, sorting, offering, agreeing, answering in well-accustomed replies. Luis sat in silence, with eyes that drowsed a little as they watched; yet he, too, chose and disapproved for the palace that Rowly had made, and saw the colours come up for judgment against the cameo of Julian's cheek.

Rowly's lids dropped as he fingered the last design. He seemed to sink lower in the bed. Crane extinguished the lamp, and let the night-light rule once more. He stole to the window, and leaned out, but could hear no sound of approach. Behind him, Rowly was still murmuring with that tongue of his that could not be still.

"Every wise man ties himself down," he was saying, as Luis stooped to hear. "There's a call for most of us in our blood, one way or another, all the time, and we've got to fight it or pay, and we never pay alone. I've fought. Seems strange that such a coward should ever come through."

He opened his eyes unexpectedly, and looked at his brother.

"But I was horribly afraid!" he said, for the second time, in a clearer tone. "It was so long, you see—all these months. If only it could have been over at once. . . . But I've begun to think it was punishment, you know, punishment for being such a coward. Because I was afraid, everybody was afraid, all the people who really cared, and they—don't laugh—they pushed it away. It was held back, and couldn't get near, and so it was all to go through again. But to-night I wasn't afraid. I'm not sure that I wasn't rather glad. You see, I was very tired, and you thought me an awful ass. . . . So nobody else was afraid, either, and that means that I can go. You can feel the difference in the house, can't you?—just as if every person and thing had given consent at last?"

"No!" Luis said. He spoke in a loud, defiant voice that startled even himself. "Not I. I haven't given consent."

Rowly's face took on a piteous strain that was terrible to see. He half-raised himself in the bed, clutching at the coverlet and the patterns lying round. Crane ran forward and halted, leaning towards him as if ready to leap. The Cocker whimpered suddenly on the floor. The curtains filled with a little whip, and emptied again with a sharp sigh.

"You mustn't say that, old man! Don't think it or feel it—please! You'll hold it back, and I'll have to bear it again, and I can't—I won't—I shouldn't know how. I should shoot myself . . . no, no . . . silly ass . . . no, no. . . ."

He sank back, drawing the coverlet over his mouth, the fierce trembling of his body shaking the bed. The curtains filled again with a sinister crack. All over and around the house there seemed to come a stir, as if that sudden moment of fear were drawing resources to its aid. A bird called without, mocking and harsh. The peace of the night seemed to be lifting and shredding away, tearing in ragged holes as the spears of panic went through. Crane took another step, and spoke.

"Say what he wants, sir—say it quick! He's getting frightened again, and we'll all follow." Already his own hands twitched. "You must. My God! Hasn't he had enough?"

The agitation widened and grew. It seemed to be driving in outward-spreading circles from the room. The bird outside called again, and others answered it, all of them jarring, unnatural, and drear. In the corridor there were shuffling steps and a hushed mutter of speech. The Cocker threw up his head, and began his keening, blood-chilling note, but Crane flung himself at him, with both hands pressed to his throat. The quiet air quivered on all sides as if bludgeoned and torn. Luis leaned over the bed.

"Old man—it's all right. I'll not keep you. I'll not so much as wish. Go! God bless you. God be with you. Go!"

A sort of sigh went through the room. The sounds in the corridor ceased. The curtains drooped softly

in long, graceful lines. The night-world sank again into rest. Crane knelt with his head against the bed, the Cocker snuggled at his knee. The movement under the coverlet ceased. It dropped away from lips grown smiling and utterly still. . . .

The transparent dark lifted to grey. Incredibly pure light stole by inches into the room, before which the night-light flickered and went out. Under the window a blackbird twittered sleepily and tenderly, and then broke into long trumpet-notes, like the call of some gold shepherd-pipe waking the day on the Plains of Heaven. There were steps coming up the stairs, the steady step of the healer that neither frets nor awakes. Crane was standing to attention when Myre came into the room.

"I hurried for all I was worth, but the car jibbed. I had to walk the last mile." At the bedside he laid his fingers on the thin wrist, staring a little at the litter round and the silk still crumpled in the palm. In the pause he seemed to be listening to a voice that spoke from very far off, fading and fainting through the gates of dawn. Presently he drew his hand away, and straightened himself. The white fingers of the growing day were bathing Rowly's face from their purifying cup of milk and wine.

Followed by the Cocker, padding at his heels, Luis went out, and saw the hall-door still wide. The first shafts of the sun were striking through a window at the back across the dark shine of the floor. The house was full of a clean fragrance and eddies of brightening air. In his own room, the sun, coming over the tops, was smiting from wall to wall. The pungent scent of hay swept up from the fields below the farm. The fell was all splashed with green and gold,

except at its pencilled edge against the sky, and across it the flock moved by twos and threes, with their white bodies and black hoofs. Their familiar, mournful cry came sharp and musical from slope and steep.

CHAPTER XV

DEATH, as Rowly had foretold, attained him the distinction denied by Luis to his life. With the dropped flag and the drawn blinds, the passing-bell rung in the little church across the park, tolled in triplets at first, and after in a long chain of halting, stricken notes, the mind of the countryside was turned to Thorns. The tribute to the majesty of death is still the greatest ever paid; fitly, perhaps, since it is so often the only one that comes a man's way. The debts of friendship, acquaintance, association and prestige have a trick of being shelved for settlement upon the counter of a closing grave. Then, in the wave of general loss, the breaking of bonds however lightly held, a hurried payment is made with a circlet of flowers, a lifted hat and a muttered prayer, a vague feeling that something is lost greater than one knew.

Everybody had known Rowly Huddleston. Most people had liked him; most, too, had found him comic—among them, some of those who had liked him best. And one and all had made use of him, for their own or other and more altruistic ends. Now that he was gone, he would be missed in a hundred strangely different ways, not only as a dispenser of alms and sympathy and service, but as a convenient peg upon which to hang a laugh. The charities which he had propped would cross his name sadly from their lists. The Club would be duller for lack of Rowly's sayings on its lips.

Pampered pensioners would unsneck the door to the unaccustomed wolf. Bench and political platform, council and association, would find something gone that had made for sunshine and goodwill in the chatterer who, for all his limitations, had so often struck the right path through the prompting of his breeding and the wise eyes of his heart.

The tents had vanished from the scarred lawns, stealthily and in haste, as if from the scene of an accomplished crime. The gardeners hunted bean-bags from the beds, and the roses washed away in dew all memory of the fortunes that they would not live to see. Inside the house, order stole back on velvet feet. The cane chairs, the platform and the Turkey red were spirited forth as things common and unclean. Ivory and silver, jade and cut glass came back to Rowly's palace, as before—the gleam of polished wood and silk brocade, the calm and cleanliness of air unfretted by over many human sounds or too much human breath. Yet to Crane, superintending the hushed and speedy change, the room still wore a slightly battered look, lacked that delicate, feminine finish that Rowly had so prized. Dissatisfied and troubled, he filled it at last with flowers—carnation, lily, lily, rose—and was beaten on that ground as well, since the house reeked with the flowers of death.

The wreaths came at all hours, from all places, all manner and collections of persons—beautiful and expensive, yet terrible, too; also, at last, a little farcical in their accumulation, day by day. The white billows of their petals had overflowed Rowly's room into the corridor outside, where the servants, curious and awed, tiptoed from one tribute to the next. Their own, shaped, like that of the tenants', after the ram's horns,

was laid, with the latter, at Rowly's feet. They had seen it for themselves when the whole staff, indoor and out, had taken their last look and said a last good-bye. He had seemed very small and quiet ; strangely different, the majority had thought. It was almost as if he had lived too hurriedly ever to be really seen, as if the vibrations of his chatter and haste, spreading about him like a shaken veil, had blurred him even to the most attentive eye.

To Luis, the flowers were a nightmare both of sight and scent. He felt as if the house would never be free again from the intolerable burden of both. It seemed to him that he had only to look out to see a cardboard box come pelting up the drive—had a vision of them, in dreadful procession, threading the avenue from the lodge. Yet he went patiently through the labels and cards, standing by while Crane made his list for a reporter tactfully retired, inquiring about one and another, from the monumental offerings of societies and Boards to the little heartsease cross that had been left at the back door. He had a feeling that in some degree he could atone by mentally fixing each token of recognition and esteem ; as if Rowly, somewhere within reach, seeing him stoop to each message of regret, might thrill at last with well-earned, conscious pride.

It had, at least, its effect upon himself. In the nightmare and gloom his sense of race began definitely to stir. The repeated note of the labels swelled for him at last into a salute meant not only for his brother but the family and the house. His impersonal attitude yielded to interest and pride. The sympathy shown on every side, the claims of the tenants to be bearers, the complimentary squad of police, the crawling string of carriages and cars, the churchyard, black with folk

to the road and the adjoining fields, all became matters touching and adding to himself. Details, even—the new black liveries, the ram's horns on the coffin-plate, even the county paper's effort, with its black-edged portrait and lengthy screed, played their part in the ceremonial due, not to one man alone, but to one man for himself and all the rest. Now he saw what Rowly had grasped, when he had sought to tie himself down ; that heritage, viewed aright, is not merely a matter of houses and lands.

.That he himself had an heir, who must now be taken into account, came to him as a shock. The fact, however, ended there, for the time. Crane had telegraphed various persons in his name, but the one of peculiar importance did not appear, somebody instructed thereto replying that he was engaged upon a geological survey in regions not defined. Luis sat through a couple of meals and on several carriage-seats with vague relatives who told him tales of their youth, and refused his formal invitation to stay on. When they were gone, he recalled them only as silhouettes on the blank wall of his mind.

In the long act of the sunset he wandered with Bill in the park, and came home to find Crane setting still fresher flowers in the Mauve Room, passing, with the tall glasses in his hands, through the bright ladder-rays slanting from the sky. Luis nodded to him to proceed as he stepped within.

" Yes, I'm stopping on," he said to Bill, as if clinching a previous remark, " at least, for a while, until everything is straight. I can't leave all Rowly's threads hanging loose. You will be able to tell me which to pick up."

" It is dangerous to pick up another man's threads," Bill mused. " They have a trick of winding round you

before you know where you are. Then you are bound by them, too, for the rest of your life."

"I must take the risk," Luis said. His eyes dwelt on the corner of the room where Julian had stood, trying to recreate his impression of her hair against the wall.

"Not so long ago you were in possession of a valuable asset known as a career."

"So I was. So, perhaps, I hope to be again. But for the moment I must stay."

"And I believe you're glad!" Bill stared with pleased surprise. "I thought you might feel it when you came into the place, but I hardly looked for it so soon."

Luis laughed and coloured, fending him off.

"Oh, well, I don't know. I have grown to a certain liking for it, of course. But I am conscious of having been unfair to my brother while he was alive. I should like to make amends by carrying on some of his pet schemes."

"They were all that—weren't they, Crane? All his geese were swans, all his counterfeit coins ringing gold."

Crane set a tall Madonna lily before the happy monk in his cell. Each of the little foreign pictures was stealing its special glory from the sun.

"I think, sir, that he loved beauty so much, he could see it when other folks were all blind—yes, and make it when it wasn't there to see. It's only the very finest can do that, and nobody ever thought him fine but me. They thought him funny and fussy, and sometimes rather daft. They thought him easy to put on, and bully, and make do. They thought he liked their old meetings and their dull business and their dull talk. What he really liked was quiet hours and comfort, and

somebody's love-story, sure to end as it should. He liked pictures and good wallpapers and beautiful furniture and coloured silks, and he sat in court-rooms and board-rooms and Public-rooms and schools, and looked at bare walls and dusty tables, squabbling faces and ugly clothes. He was faddy about his food, liked it nicely cooked and decently served, and half the time he never caught up with his meals, and, when he did, he was too backset and foreset to notice which of 'em was which. It hurt him to hear of suffering or distress, and he was always having cases to assist. It hurt him like knives to pass sentence on a man, and yet he sat on the Bench, and at Quarter Sessions, and tried to be just. He hated the cold, and he spent every winter of his life up here. He used to warm himself at his pictures, so to speak. We don't know where folks go to when they die, but I suppose we're all of us free to guess, and I choose to think of the master as gone into this priest-chap here, where he can be quiet and warm, and look out for ever into the blue."

"Good for you, Crane!" Bill flashed him an appreciative smile. "I wanted him with—with my people, you know, but I like your idea best."

"He was a priest here, sir, if it comes to that—the priest of a gospel that looked all patchwork and fuss, but the real pattern's on the other side. Look at him in the picture, staring out. He's seeing the pattern as it is."

"We can leave him there, Crane, quite content. There's any amount in that pattern, you know. It will take him a long time to see it all."

"Yes, sir, he's happy now, but only a few days back he was in hell. And all the months before it was the same, only getting worse, all the time. It came just

when he was tired and beginning to feel old, and he couldn't always keep himself brave. Nobody but me knew just how frightened he was—nobody but me. Many and many a night we've sat up, talking, trying to figure out how and when it would be, and when one of us broke down, the other would buckle to and stiffen up. One day he came home with some stuff he'd got, I don't know where, that he said would finish him off quick. He swore he'd take it and be done, but I grabbed it from him, and held him off, though he cried and begged for it like a child. . . ." (The tears began to run down his face; his voice broke and swelled and rose.) "It was all I could do not to let him have his way—we both of us wanted it so bad! But I couldn't, no, no, I couldn't . . . I wasn't brave enough for that. There was nothing anyway else I wouldn't have done, if it could have eased him at all—lying, stealing . . . yes, and worse. . . . But I wasn't brave enough for that."

"Be careful!" Bill said, in his gentle voice. "He hasn't gone very far. He may hear you, and remember, and look back."

Crane caught at his breath, and was still. He looked at the picture, and saw that it was in shadow, the shadow of his own form stepped between it and the sun. With an exclamation he stood aside, and let it drink again at the light. The monk's smile seemed to deepen as his face caught the evening glow.

Luis, listening in silence, wore a curious expression, like that of a man, destined to some strange disease, hearkening to its details suffered by another. When he spoke, it was with impersonal interest, as of something a very long way off.

"I suppose—if I stay—all *that* may happen to me, too. *Vederemos!* It is rather unthinkable, isn't it,

looking at it from here? I don't say that I believe, and most certainly I am not afraid. I don't think that, in any case, I should be afraid, but there is no accounting for fear. Still, there will always be Crane to see me through."

The man looked up quickly.

"Then I'm not to go—not to leave, sir, after all? I thought you'd be sure to turn me off."

"My good soul, how on earth should I survive a single day? I rely on you at every turn."

"I can't see how you can trust me . . . I can't see. . . ."

"Oh, that!" Luis said carelessly. "But that's past. We were none of us responsible beings, that night. Really, I can't pretend to struggle with the house alone. You'll simply have to stand by."

"You're very good, sir! I'll be only too glad." The cold face shone with gratitude and relief. He took a last glance at the picture, as if conveying or receiving some message of content, and disappeared from the room.

"I'm your debtor, too," Bill said, when he had gone. "I resented you, at first . . . perhaps you know?—I used to think you did, sometimes . . . though of course it didn't last. You've learned something about the estate, by now, but I can help you to the rest. I believe you ticketed me an idle scoundrel, for ever wasting Rowly's time, but I was more use than you knew. You see, we were all trying to steady him a bit. Even my dear old mother sent messages and damson gin. I'm still sorry he isn't with *them*, but Crane has fixed him splendidly all right. I do hope you'll let me lend a hand."

"I shall be grateful beyond words. Of course, I

must look out for an agent very soon. I can't expect you to run round for me as you did for Rowly. And when I *do* go, there will have to be somebody left in charge."

He knew, when he said that, how he hovered between two ideas—between the old, bright, planned passion and the faint, suggestive new. The latter walked sweetly through healthful, calm days—life as they had made it at Fallowfield, as Julian might have made it, at Thorns. It allured him as a cloud-picture allures, ignoring the absence of a linking stair, and in the next instant he thought of the *Querida*, dancing on the bay. He was only deceiving himself, after all. While he dallied with suggestion and vision, his soul kept its secret orchard of escape.

Over at Roselands, Mrs Garnett sat at her roll-top desk, settling the accounts of the Bazaar. There was a new sharpness in the oval of her smooth face, but its expression was untroubled and pleasantly absorbed. Neither letter nor figure halted under her pen, as it ran its severely tidy course. The results of the sale were grateful to her eye. The affair had worked out remarkably well, but then, her undertakings always did work out well. If there was any doubt about a cause, she simply let it alone, which, as the initiated know, is the whole secret of success.

Julian was at the window, with her back to this triumph of charitable intent. She looked tired, far more tired than her mother, threading a winding maze of sums. It had been a tremendous day, exalting and terrifying by turn. Even she, until that pageant of homage in the full churchyard, had not known precisely what Rowly had meant. Now she was troubled lest

she, too, had belittled him in his life, laughed at him, even while she had loved. She should have been more careful of the dignity he had never claimed. He seemed rather strange to her now, even in memory a little changed. Her heart ached at the thought that even she had kept him short of his due.

Down in the garden, her father walked between flower-walls higher than his head. Now and then she saw him through the network of crimson ramblers, his slow tramp pacing his slow mind, following the course of his friend's finished life. Henry had gone, and many another since then, and now Rowly had left him, too. He felt lonely and old and dull. He would have liked Bill to be walking beside him, saying nothing, just tramping along. At least he had Bill left to him yet—Julian and Bill.

Mrs Garnett looked up from a lengthy column.

"I suppose you don't happen to remember what the bran-tub made? Rowland's figures were always distressingly indistinct, and these might have been written with a spoon."

Julian went across and stood at her side, the sight of the shaky scrawl bringing tears into her throat—the last, straggling, painful effort of his pen.

"I think it is a five," she said, her eyes filling as she laid the paper down. "You know, his fives always looked like very tired, crumpled, old men, struggling home from work. This one seems to have fainted by the way."

"I dislike an over-strained imagination." Mrs Garnett copied the offending figure with print-like clarity, as if in rebuke to the dead man's scrawl. "I suppose you have caught this particular trick from Bill, but it sounds rather silly, sometimes."

"I'm sorry." Julian turned away. "Perhaps I have, as you say. We have been together so much, and I like his way of looking at things."

"There are other ways," her mother announced, with crisp finality. "Personally, I prefer one rather more suggestive of common sense. What is he doing with himself to-night?"

"I believe he is at Thorns." She lingered a little on the name. Just about this hour she had been with Luis in the Mauve Room, and had felt the barrier between them break away. Yes, there were other ways, alluring vistas through other minds. Hitherto, she had been content to walk in Bill's. She was still content, as far as she knew. Only, there were other ways. . . .

Her mother's exclamation turned her once more. She was frowning delicately at a letter.

"The bill from the people who provided the tents. I telephoned for it, early, to-day, and it came by the evening post, with a letter as well. They say they had to clear away so fast that some of their things were left behind, and when they rang up Thorns to know if they had been found, Crane replied that all *débris* in the grounds had been burnt, so of course they have put them into the account. Really, you know, it is altogether too bad, because there wasn't the slightest need for such ridiculous haste. I expect, if the truth were known, that man of Rowland's simply bullied them off the place. I can't but think that the estate should be made to pay."

"It can't be much, Mother, and Rowly—Mr Huddleston—gave a great deal. The gardens must have suffered, too, and the house."

"They will recover, and Thorns can afford it perfectly

well. We have made our money, of course ; in fact, we have quite outdone our hopes. It is the principle of the thing, that is all."

" ' When thou drinkest Wine, pour a draught on the ground ! ' " Julian quoted, with a faint smile. " No, Mother. That isn't Bill."

" I always said that Rowland spoilt that creature, Crane. He spoilt all his servants, of course ; they never kept their place. They knew he was foolishly weak, and took advantage accordingly."

" Don't blame him to-day, Mother. Nobody blames him, to-day."

" Why not ? Don't be sentimental, please. I dislike anything of the kind. Rowland may be a tin god of sorts, now that he is dead, but he was often very inadequate, when he was alive."

" Surely that is rather hard—from *you* ? " Julian's voice shook. " Nobody ever had such perfect service as you had from him. He put you first always, and your wishes and your good works, even when he found them tiresome and dull. Yes, he *did* find them tiresome, sometimes." She spoke quietly, but with earnest reproach. " He was often tired and ill, and you would not admit it. You would not believe that—that perhaps he might be going to die very soon. Instead, you went on asking for things, and running him here and there. Nobody will ever serve you like that again, and yet you have never even seemed to care. One can't even tell whether you are sorry, now that he is gone. You never had a good word for him when he was alive, but, now that he is dead, you might be just a little kind."

Mrs Garnett looked at her calmly over the top of the desk.

" You think I drove him too hard ? "

" Yes."

" That I helped to kill him with the Bazaar ? "

" Oh, how can you bear to think . . . !—yes, I do."

" That I did not believe in those absurd sheep ? "

Julian was silent, and the elder woman looked down. Her fine pen began to move over the clean sheet, making little tracings of which she was not aware. When she spoke again, it was in a low, impersonal tone, as if she were merely thinking aloud.

" You have taken such a long time to grow up. I don't suppose you have ever realised how a woman may be driven to extremes. You are sentimental, too. You would forgive, even where you despised. Now I am not like that. You get it, I suppose, from your father, or from Bill, with his pretty-pretty world of dreams. You know, of course, like everybody else in this chatty little county, that Rowland loved me when we were young. What you do not know is that I loved him, too ; at least, I imagined so, then. Now, for my pride's sake, I prefer to think that I could have loved him if he had been worth a love like mine. But, after he had spoken, he remembered the family curse, and he drew back. He said that, if I cared, I should suffer, and that it would not be fair. He pictured me living in dread from day to day. He never seemed to see that I was bound to suffer, in any case, as things were, and he would not admit that I had a right to my choice." She dropped her pen, and lifted her eyes to her daughter, bitter with unforgiving memory. " He could not realise that, when a woman cares, she wants to suffer at her man's side, not only to help him and to be with him to the last, but because she knows she will suffer a thousand times more anywhere else. I *did* believe

in the sheep—oh, yes, I did—but I loved him, and I was not afraid. It was he who was afraid—for me—and after the first I was too proud to insist. But, when the worst was over, I found a little comfort in despising him because he had not understood, because he was too stupid to see that he thrust upon me the harder cross, too soft-fibred to dare to trust either my strength or my love. It helped me, to scorn him, and so I allowed it to grow . . . how could I have borne the loss of him without? He took it patiently, of course—he took everything patiently—gave me everything I asked, except my heart's desire. Do you wonder I thought so little of the rest? I have made him pay, every year since that day, and when the thing happened that he had allowed to come between, I pretended that I did not believe, that he was growing old, that it was nothing but nerves . . . I could have helped him—once. I might have been his strong arm. If need be, I could have gone, too. . . . Oh, you're too young, too silly, to understand! I had a right, a supreme right, and he took it from me without my leave—the right to suffer, if I chose."

In the silence following, her eyes went back to the sheet, staring at it with vague surprise, as if she wondered by what outside power it had come to look like that. Then she laid it aside, and took up her fine pen. She waved her daughter delicately away.

"You had better go to your father, I think. He knows all about it, as he knows many things he neither asks nor hears. And don't pity me . . . you are quite capable of it . . . please. Not every woman has the courage to kill the thing she loves. . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

BILL set his house in order. His mother's old servants were still with him, and her wishes and ordinances were still observed. The low, pleasant rooms were just as she had left them, and all, whether used or not, were cleaned in their former, regular routine. The cook continued to serve the dishes she had preferred. The gardener grew her favourite cottage-pinks, and the cabbage she had fancied most. The tradesmen kept faithfully to her particular lines.

Hitherto, Bill had never been known to interfere, being neither a fastidious nuisance nor annoyingly slack. He left things about—fishing-tackle and old pipes and worn, leather-backed, yellow-paged books—but he was not often unpunctual, and he seldom complained. Now, however, he upset the house in a sudden flurry and rush, as if bent on driving all before him after years of inanition and pause. In the space of one week he had every room turned out, scoured and polished, the carpets beaten, curtains washed, covers and quilts renewed. On every dressing-table flowers were set, as if to greet an imminent guest. Joiners were summoned to doubtful handles, locksmiths to rebellious locks. Guns and crops went suitably to their racks, rods to their authorised corners, tackle and pipes into an old oak chest. All the grass was freshly mown, the drive regravelled and rolled. Servants and charwomen, scrubbing and shining, with the windows wide to the

summer days, whispered that there would be a wedding very soon.

But their minds were leaping further ahead than his. Just as he had waited through his mother's last years, feeling that the time was not yet ripe; as he had held his peace through Rowly's last months, because, while claimed by that agony, he could not give himself wholly to the expression of his love—so now, with all obstacles apparently removed, he yet paused to clear and clean his little world before he made his Great Assay. He was not the man to wait until the marriage-day was fixed before beautifying his dwelling or clearing the recesses of his mind. He went through his small collection of grudges, and sank them, once for all. He answered letters of long standing, and returned (with healthful shame) one or two borrowed books. He even made desperate attempts to settle bills which were not yet due, thereby harrying several kindly souls. His thirst for perfection, his superfine sense of the fitness of things, forced him to make all ready about him and within before he put his fortune to the test. It seemed to him that his lady was worth nothing less. Whether he won her or not, the supreme moment had been approached in the perfect way, along the clean path that he had swept for the hope of her returning feet.

It was very warm when he set out, turning into the lane that bordered his own fields. From the gate he threw a last look at the house, which, with its clean gravel, trimmed creepers and snowy, dropped blinds, resembled a well-bred, toileted old dame, nodding, without loss of dignity, to her afternoon sleep. There had been a tiny, pattering shower, which had laid the dust, and brought out every scent and colour in the

lane, all of them warm and rich to either nostril or eye. The grass looked amazingly thick and extraordinarily green. The hedges, which, in winter, were a mere fretwork of naked boughs, were now impenetrable barriers and fastnesses and towers, wide, living walls, set on high, green banks. At the back of Fallowfield, both men and maid-servants were making hay, and when he came home again he meant to follow suit. He could hear their voices floating over the hedge, and the whir of the machine laying a fresh field for the weather to hold in trust. When he reached a gate, breaking upon him like an opened eye, he stopped to watch his people at work, gazing contentedly at the picture he knew so well—the brown, hot faces of the men, the cotton frocks and bonnets of the girls, the roan horse piled to its shoulders with the hay, the figure, topping the load, black in the golden ether below the sapphire blue. The shower had scarcely wetted the cocks, but, like a careful master, he stepped inside and stooped to examine the crop. It came up crisp and light under his touch, killed successfully by the often-deceptive sun. There would be no smoking stacks with this, no anxious setting ajar of barn-doors. He looked at the sky, the birds, the shadows of sheep on the misty slopes, and decided that the weather would hold. He wanted to leave even the haytime fixed within his ordered scheme of things.

All along the lane, the wild roses, in an infinity of brotherhood, threaded his borders with tangles of white, of deep pinks and pale, arching at times over his head to show their perfect complexions against the blue, and running ahead in long, rioting, delicate lines, until, at a turn of the lane, they met, as it were, and merged into one. Here and there, a bough of honeysuckle

leaned across his way, its curving, fringed fingers yellow as ripe corn. There was honeysuckle always somewhere near; he could smell it even when he could not see it, even though the whole lane really smelt of nothing else, except the hay and the roses, and fifty other things totally distinct; so he went looking for it, as one goes, year after summer year, until the branch of glory bannered his fragrant path, or was flung in a gold cuirass across the green breast of the hedge. The tall foxgloves filed upon the banks, straight as lances, purple-pink, a regiment sprung to honour the project of the day.

He must have guessed he would find her on the way, or in the heat he would have driven the few miles lying between their homes. At all events, he met her, after a while, where the lane, hitherto spied upon only from between stoups, opened itself to the full light of day. The hedge, on one side loftier and more arrogant than before, had, on the other, fallen to its knees, as though crushed beneath the scented weight it bore. Folk were making hay in half a dozen fields stretching out to the faint earth-line on either hand. When they could not be seen, or only vaguely, like figures moving in some rite, the whir of the cutter linked them all across the land. Here, where Julian had stopped, Luis also had stood, one late November evening, in the mist.

She smiled when she sighted Bill around that corner which was sacred to loved ones not quite seen, but doubtfully, and with troubled eyes. For the first time in her life she was not quite ready for him, not altogether in tune, but he brought his own welcome as he approached, for he was one of those people to whom bodiless troubles explain themselves without clue. He saw that she was

faintly distressed, and was almost glad, as all lovers, at times, are glad, because the wistful soul draws closer than the perfectly content.

She had not passed through any of her late ordeals unscathed. Rowly's death, preceded by that passionless leave-taking on the steps, had shadowed the clearness of her normal mind. She had begun to question the reality of things, to feel that none of her premises was secure. Her mother's revelation had been a shock, a scar on the fair surface of her life. When family masks are lifted, as they are, now and then, the very foundations of being reel to and fro.

Her broken promise also weighed her down, only her sense of guilt was passing its debt to the living from the dead. What, exactly, she wondered, had she done to Luis, when she spoke? She tried to put herself in his place, to feel something of what he surely must feel, and found herself, by no conscious transition, standing in her mother's, instead. She struggled to keep her mind from following on, but could not wholly shut the question out—Was she a short step, or very far, from facing the problem for herself?

"Times and a time are past," Bill said, at her side, "and yet you mercifully still exist. How long is it since I saw you last? I know, of course. I was coming over to your house, because they don't like me, at mine."

"Why, Billy! You're so meek, as a rule. What did you do?"

"Oh, I did quite a lot. I spring-cleaned the universe at the end of June. I had things mended which, by all household laws, you can't possibly mend later than May. I stood the house on its head, and shook it to make sure that it was whole. I had rooms got ready

for people who hadn't even been asked. I tried to pay money to people who wept at me to take it away. I tidied my impedimenta and my sins into corners where they won't ever be found when they are urgently required. I hung up a clean slate on a brass nail, and when I had swept the sky with a broom, I came to look for you."

"Bill, dear, the hay must have gone to your head! Mother reproved me, not so long ago, for talking like that. Better, of course, but still, rather like that."

"You must have been talking our language in the wrong place. And I don't believe it was better, you know, though I'm willing to try."

"It was something about Rowly and that horrible Bazaar . . . no, I ought not to tell you, I suppose."

"Please don't. That's one of the things I've tidied away. I don't remember what Rowly suffered; only that he does not suffer any more. I've spring-cleaned all the terror and pain out of our country of the mind. You won't find any of it at Fallowfield, when—oh sweetheart, I'm afraid to say 'if!'—you come."

She stood very still, looking away over the fields, the sun running a leafy pattern over her gown and along the brim of her wide hat. Just below them, on the other side of the hedge, a little spring bubbled and talked, spraying its cool, musical chatter along the hot surface of the air. After a moment, he put out his hand to a pink rosebud caressing his sleeve, shifting his eyes from her face.

"It is 'if,' after all? Or, something worse?"

She gave a quick sigh.

"Something has happened, Billy! I don't believe I'm in our Country any more. I believe I must have been tidied out of it, too—not by you, of course, oh, not

by you! I came here to-day to see if I was just imagining things, hoping I should feel as I used to feel, and find everything the same, but I don't, and it isn't, and I'm afraid I can't. Something has gone completely away, and I believe it's myself."

"Tell me what is different, dear. How does it look?"

"I don't know—yes, I do. Like any bit of pretty country up and down the land. It is new, and I have nothing to give it, and it has nothing for me. I can't see myself playing in the hay, or riding to the barns, or wandering over the fields. I don't see us following the hounds, or watching the ploughing, or driving home from the shows. I don't hear any more the things we used to say. I should not see *them* any more, around the corner of the mist. The lane to Fallowfield is the same as any other lane, not as it used to be, when Fallowfield was my real home, and your mother's mine as well. I always meant to come there to stop"—she gave him a wistful smile—"even though I hadn't been asked!"

"You were always asked, every minute of every day. No, you weren't, either, because you were there already, you see. You don't believe, do you, that I waited because I didn't care? I wanted to be able to fill the whole world with you—just you—and I couldn't do that while my dear old mother was alive. I couldn't leave her out. And then, there was Rowly . . . I didn't mean to bring him back, but I must, this once . . . I had to help there, as well. They tie you, you know—another person's love, or another's pain. There was Luis to put in the way of things, too. . . . I couldn't have borne it, I think, if I hadn't been seeing you every day, and if I hadn't been quite sure that you knew. I don't mean that I took things for granted; I won't insult you by asking if you believed that. It was just

that I wanted the whole air clear about me, first, not so much as a thought that wasn't yours, nothing so much out of gear as a bell that wouldn't ring, or a handle that had lost a screw. It sounds rather absurd, perhaps, but it was my way. Perhaps it was wrong, too, but it was my way. And you mustn't think of me as just smugly satisfied and content. Sometimes I couldn't bear it at all. I just wanted you, and wanted to get to you, and I didn't care what the road was like. I used to pray, very boldly and loud—'Oh, Lord, make room about me for to go!' . . . And then I'd see my dear old mother in her gardening hat, or Rowly, shivering at a sheep. . . ."

Thorns came up about her, full of the cloudy mystery of that last, strange night, its sentient shadows and sweets from the garden at eve. She saw Luis bending over her, and heard his voice at her ear; and then was listening to Bill again, speaking from very far.

"Dearest, I've got to fetch you back! It can't be such a very long way, because I've been watching you all the time. Can't I magic you, somehow? . . ." He caught her hands. "The white cherry opposite my window is over, but it will bloom again. I used to talk to it of you. From the lane it was like a white hand waving over the wall. From the window it was a vase set on the dark-blue altar of the night. Then it made a white carpet for its own feet. . . . *I used to talk to it of you!* What shall I do, next year, when the cherry blooms again?"

"The dear cherry!" She sighed. "But the blossom blows away so soon. I used always to be afraid that I should miss seeing it in flower."

"The syringa is still out . . . you know how it smells, in the dark, and how it looks like little, white, waxen

stars? It is the last guest at night, before the door is shut, except the hay, which stays the whole night long."

"Yes, yes." She smiled. "Go on! Lately, I seem to forget." . . . He went on bravely, trying to disbelieve the ache at his heart, the assurance of his brain that love need not be angled for, captured with any silken net. . . .

"There is nothing altered inside the house. It is just very sweet and fresh and clean. All the floors and the legs of the furniture look like bits of an old violin. All the old bowls are filled with new rose-leaves, and there are lots of those little silk *pouffes* that you squeeze and run away, and when you creep back there is lavender growing somewhere in the room. The windows have frilly curtains, and the chairs have frilly aprons, and the dressing-tables have frilly skirts. None of the frills have ever seen a town water-supply or a chemical soap. They were washed with dew and rain, and dried in clover and the Wind of Heaven. In the parlour, the oak chair with the blue cushion looks out on to the lawn. The beaded footstool is in front of the chair. When the shadows come down, the grandfather's clock, with his deep, preaching voice, makes the house seem very empty and still, but it is not empty, because you are sitting in the chair. You have your feet on the beaded stool, little feet like shadows more velvet than the rest. And then, when you are nearly lost to view, I shut the hall-door for the night. . . ."

She clung to his fingers, her eyes filling with tears.

"Oh, I do belong—I do! I don't want anything else. I thought, perhaps, I had gone too far away ever to get back. I suppose one does do that, sometimes—turn away from the things one really

loves to others rather tempting and strange. I had a glimpse of another country, different from ours, but beautiful, too . . . terrifying, perhaps . . . but still beautiful. . . ."

He watched her go, under his very eyes. His hold on her hands could not keep her, his nearness, his passionate gaze. She was no more in touch with him, gave him no more than the rosebud pressing on him from the hedge. He picked it to get rid of it, and, lifted above the welter of the crowd, its smooth, pink face seemed to assert a superiority of fate, a distinction meritoriously achieved. He tried to smile as Julian turned away, distressed and ashamed.

"Dearest, I shouldn't have magicked you! It was wrong. Love doesn't need any weaving of spells. Set out on your travels, if you must. I won't bring you to Fallowfield by any witch-words. What should I do with you there, oh, my dear? I couldn't keep you chained to the door-scraper, or chalk a circle round you, all day long. I couldn't be always putting out the broom to say that the wife was away. When you come, you must come because there isn't any other possible place in the world; because your heart and your feet would bring you, even if you were asleep. They say, you know, that people always come back to the country where they belong. Perhaps you will come again, too. It will be rather lonely there until you do—nothing but fathers and mothers and a blue silk parasol. . . ." He laughed cheerfully, and she tried to smile in return. "You see, I'm weaving again! May I take you home—if you're going home? Very well. I'll cut along back to the hay."

The afternoon seemed hotter, as he went back. The heavy hedges pressed towards him, and the scent of

the honeysuckle made him a little dazed and faint. The road under his feet seemed to be growing dusty again, and there was something brazen now about the brilliant arch of the sky. A desolate silence appeared to have fallen upon the vivid life of the lane, a silence in which he found himself listening to his own step, going away from her for ever and ever and ever. . . . He was so intent upon that incredible fact that the voices from his own fields made him start, hurting him as the silence had hurt him, only in a different way. He had always loved working in the hay, and he paused at the gate, trying to make up his mind to go in, but he could not bring himself to enter the field. The glowing, happy picture seemed to stab his eyes. His heart began to beat with a great fear, and, turning away, he hurried on to the house.

It was fast asleep, by now, tranquilly, unreservedly asleep, its conscious dignity exchanged for that of absolute repose. It made him think of his dear old mother, taking her afternoon nap. Many a time he had peeped in at her from window or door, and seen her drift to that stillness before which we stand always a little reverent and kind. It had seemed to him that the furniture had slept, too, and that the sun between the blinds stayed where it was until she awoke. Because of these memories, he went along the grass-borders with quiet feet, and slid in at his door like a burglar or his own ghost. And first he went to the parlour, and sat down before the oak chair with the blue cushion and the beaded stool.

But he did not stay there very long. He had told her that she was always at Fallowfield, but she was not there, now. The chair, turned to face the lawn, had a blank, lifeless, uncaring look, holding nothing of what

he loved. Perhaps, so he told himself, it would be different when the shadows came. Perhaps it was only shock that had blinded his mental vision. . . . He got up again, and wandered through the low, still rooms, and up the shallow, glossy stairs, the big clock muttering lazily as he passed. All the windows were open, upstairs, and the white bedrooms, in the summer afternoon, were monkish cells of purity and peace. The deep-set windows, very near the floor, were each a living gem of colour and light, in which the emerald brilliance of trees and uncut grass, the hot tints of the flowers, and the drowsy vistas of the hay, were focussed to dazzlement by the narrow limits of the frame. In their thin glass vases the roses drooped that she would never see.

From the kitchen came the pleasant chink of china, and the patter of steps on the flags. It was his old cook, preparing the servants' well-earned tea. The sound was pure, joyful promise in the hot, heavy afternoon. She sang in little bursts as she moved to and fro, and the clatter on the flags was cool to hear. She did not expect him to be at home, so would scarcely be likely to look for him, but he hid himself from possible search. Presently, the maids came in from the field, and the clatter and clink were louder than before. There was talk, too, and some laughter over the fortune-telling of cups. The men were having their meal under the hedge, brought to them by wife or child. Bill watched them from his window upstairs, and knew how good it must taste. One of the younger lads had flung himself in the heart of a cock, and the roan munched contentedly behind his back. A sable dog lay curled on a clear patch, sleeping in the sun. Some of the children had stayed, and were kneeling before the workers in a ring, sharing the little feast. There was something

sacramental about the group, in its simple expression of communion and thanks. The shadows lengthened ever so slightly under the watcher's eyes, and the fierceness went out of the sun. The splendour of the evening was beginning, full of long lights and lovely distances, pastel colourings and mellow airs. The most perfect hours of country life were at hand, each, as it sped, delicately shading into the next, a thought more subtle and serene.

The younger women went back to the hay, and the clean, sweet-smelling work went on. The old servant was now in the dining-room, laying his evening meal. He heard her there for some time, murmuring her broken song; then he heard her no more, and the silence took the house again. But it was no longer a sleepy silence, in thrall to an enchanter's wand. It was awake and waiting, with excitement in it, and little, quick thrills. Bill waited, too. . . .

He felt no summons to the work outside—he, who had never yet left his men to work alone. He looked at the glimpse of strenuous life as one uncaringly apart, knowing that the link between himself and it was gone. It was almost as if he were dead, he thought, though not in the least with that death which other people feared. The Faussetts had owed to a living death infinitely worse, and here it was, already upon Bill's heels. He remembered that he had prayed to be old, and laughed a soundless, empty laugh. God answered his prayers, too. Had He not answered the one about the room—the room about him for to go? The world had widened around him, as he asked, leaving him in it, quite alone.

The shadows came at last, and he stirred when the house stirred, as old timbers do, with the first settling

dusk. In the dining-room he could see the glimmer of white damask and silver and glass, but he turned from them to the parlour door. For a long moment he stood without, almost as if waiting to be called, his still figure rather ghostly in the half-light, fined, it seemed, for communion on a more unearthly plane. He was ready, and the hour was ready, and he stepped within, but she was not there. Even though the shadows had come, she was not there. . . .

There woke in him a blinding, searing passion of revolt and pain. The great love of his life rose upon him in a choking flood ; the little loves of hearth and home smote him with hands that he had kissed. There was nothing about him that did not make him writhe, mocking him with the future, reminding him of the past. This was the real, living death which he had feared, not that first aloofness, as of one walled in a tomb. Here, he was in the very heart of pain itself. The things which had belonged to his peace had risen upon him to his hurt. Now he remembered Ney, who had known that such betrayal could be.

He found himself, after a long while, seated at the writing-desk beyond the oak-chair. He was writing to Ney, he believed, seeing his own script, spider-like, over the page, yet feeling that it was his brain itself that wrote, finer and stiller than a pen. He had no knowledge of what he was saying, except that it was very urgent and clear, and all the while he looked from the letter to the oak chair, longing and trusting, and trusting and hungering and longing. . . .

"The syringa is beginning to smell. It never awakes until it is dusk. . . . The men must be coming in from the hay. . . . First, I shall see her feet on the beaded stool, her little velvet feet on my mother's stool. Then

her dress, white and very soft, and her hands, and then her hair. . . . I do not know if I shall see her face. . . . I shall not come if I can see her face. . . . The syringa is beginning to smell. . . .”

He stopped as suddenly as he had begun, his mind perfectly calm and clear. There was nobody in the oak chair, he saw ; there never would be anybody there. He was not in pain, now ; neither was he numb. Both terrors would return, but for the moment he could act. He wrote a short note to Ney, asking if his offer still held good—if he might come to him very soon. He heard the servants come back to the house, and clear the untouched supper away. They believed him over at Roselands, he knew, and would not worry or wait. When they had gone upstairs, he went out into the hall, and found the door still wide, and a straight, slow rain whispering sibilantly to the night. The syringa stood out on its merged background of leaf and wood and soil like a constellation of waxen stars. The scent of it came to him more passionate for the rain, insistent, cruel as a sword. He shut the door against it with an inward cry. There was no one to go with him up the stair.

CHAPTER XVII

OVER at Thorns, another man, too, had ordered his house. With Bill's help, with Johnny Ewbank's, with the aid of long homilies from his Witham solicitor and the continual promptings of Crane, Luis began to gather up the strings. He studied maps and placed boundaries, absorbed the names of farms and fields, their history, their value, present and past, and formed, not without a sense of awe, some idea of the vast legal network lying over the land. He appeared at the rent-dinner following hard upon Rowly's death, and was touched by the welcome he received. His quick grasp put him at ease in a position he had never looked to fill, and if at first he was honoured for his brother's sake, he was very soon accepted for his own. He sat patiently to deputations from clubs and associations of all kinds, and 'went into things' with the surrounding clergy, who all appeared to possess a moral lien upon the estate. He wrote politely to heads of old families, who seemed to regard him less as a private individual than as an historic event; to others, who talked a great deal about the county and his particular 'stake'; and yet to others, less careful of the dignity of their approach, troubled with halting benevolent machines, lacking the Huddleston cog; flies on the axle of so-called progress, exulting in the dust they seemed to raise.

With Rowly's charity-list he went to Dick Garnett,

rightly considering that that silent auditor of much piping to good works should know to what tunes he ought to dance. Dick cut it ruthlessly, with half-intelligible remarks that left Luis armed against any after-sieges of remorse. He engaged an agent, a young man of enthusiasms, with an historic sense pleasantly excited by the family legends and their sinister romance. He was at Thorns, learning from his employer what the latter had only just acquired himself, when Bill came over to say good-bye.

"Yes, I'm off to Ney," he said, in reply to the catalogue of questions put by Luis, always excepting the all-important one which he might not ask. "I'm going to grub under cars, after all, though I haven't had the nerve, as yet, to mention it to the gees. But I've taken to interfering in the house, and that's a sure sign a man is going to the dogs; so, as I can't even pretend that I'm working at Thorns, now that you've a pro. to help you out, I'd better get along to Manchester, and grub."

"You'll be shutting Fallowfield, I suppose?"

"Not at present, I think. I can afford it all right, and I couldn't bring myself to leave it altogether alone. Perhaps, if I get good at grubbing, old Ney will give me a screw. I don't like closed doors. People might come back."

"People?"

Bill looked embarrassed, and laughed.

"Tramps, you know—or angels. My dear old mother kept open house for both. Send me a line, sometimes, if you can. I'll write to you on Sundays, when my hands are clean."

"I shall not send you a word! You'll be back in a week. You'll hate Manchester, and break your heart

for a horse. What has taken you, *amigo mio*? And who is to tell me everybody's Christian name?"

"There's the latest *Bulmer*, somewhere in the house, and you'll have the new man and Dick. Dick's older than I am, so knows a lot more. You can always make him write it down. Besides, you're getting hold so fast."

"The point is, will it hold me?" Luis spoke half to himself, forgetting, for the moment, Bill's cataclysmic news. He was diverted, just at present, by his rôle of orthodox heir, but he was never quite sure that it was anything more than a rôle. He had no intention of leaving, just yet, but he did not feel by any means anchored for life. It was still summer, and he had his outlet on the bay, but the winter would come, and the new part would not always be new. He remembered what he had felt about the snow. . . . Later, he would need a keener incentive, a closer tie.

Bill was holding out his hand, and at the sight of it the impossible question came uppermost again. What had happened between the two so obviously meant for each other from the first, by their parents, an interested county and a genial fate? He himself had never doubted where they would end. He had thought of Julian, for the most part, as one thinks of a picture, untranslatable into human terms, but now, as Bill faded, she grew alive and close. He remembered another such moment, on the night of Rowly's death. She had tried to wound him; that in itself was bound to bring her close—the quick reaction closer still. He had forced contrition for an older hurt, and seen her troubled eyes confess the debt. He had been satisfied, then, but he was not satisfied, now—now that she had become

real, not only for an hour here and there in a long stretch of months, but to-day and to-morrow and all the days that were to come.

He walked with Bill to the lodge-gates, and the neglected agent watched them from the house. They were as distinct in type, he thought, as the classic enemies of *Westward Ho!* He had done nothing but read *Westward Ho!* since he came, together with Froude and Corbett and other authorities on the Spanish Attempt, when he ought to have been studying the working of the estate, and the ethics of cottage property, tied or free. His mind's eye endowed Luis with doublet and hose, a pointed beard, and a disposition to deep-laid schemes. It thrilled him, even to see him walk.

"You will come back." Luis repeated, at the gates.

"Some time, I suppose, but not just yet."

"You'll come, if I am in a hole?"

"Oh, yes."

"Even if I do not send?"

"Of course."

"Not that I am precisely seeking for trouble!" Luis laughed. "At present, I am inclined to look upon my progress with smug satisfaction. You should have heard me holding forth to the new man, up there! But if I come to grief, you must take the first train back."

"There is no reason why you shouldn't be all right, if only you'll keep away from the tide."

"I don't think I can promise to do that. By the way, the *Querida* is finished—did you know? I wish you were stopping to see her launched. Now that I am losing you, she will have to take the place of my best friend."

"There are best friends who claim the whole of us, leaving nothing for anybody else."

"I must follow my fate, I suppose. That was your own prescription, not so very long ago. I suppose we all bow to it, in the end."

"Not all. Some of us are dragged at the heels of other people's."

"I conclude you don't refer to yourself and Mr Ney? You said, if it came to a push—what was it?—I forget—you'd go like a trustful dog."

Bill laughed.

"No, I wasn't thinking of myself. I'm going entirely of my own accord. But the first Spanish Huddleston has the rest of you at the end of a string, and you all link others, in turn. . . . Look here, I've got a train to catch, and I'm not in the habit of doing anything so rash. . . ."

Luis pondered this enigmatic speech as he turned home. Was Bill trying to warn him off the ground which, as far as could be seen, he had not contrived to make his own? Did he think that the master of Thorns had no right to drag another into the family coil? Rowly had forgone marriage, it was true, but what had been right for him was not necessarily law for his brother. He had been lacking in backbone, open to fears, but Luis felt strong enough for others as well as himself. He could deal with the curse by land, he felt sure, and at that by sea he was still half-inclined to smile. He had enjoyed his life up to this last, extraordinary year, and he could not believe that he was doomed to a permanently tragic plane. He could not see that his marriage need be a crime. Yet it was not like Bill either to judge or to protest unless something definitely precious were at stake. Did it mean, perhaps, that he might ask, in his turn, for the gift that had eluded Faussett's grasp . . . ?

He put the idea away, as if still conscious of trespass upon rights that were not his, but it returned with growing sweetness and strength. The Julian whom he now saw at Thorns was no longer a flitting spirit made manifest by the pale reflection of its hair. In the Mauve Room, he took to dreaming of the background that would suit her best, trying in memory the patterns spread for Rowly's closing eyes. The shock of Bill's departure, real though it was, dwindled beside the hope it left behind. If indeed he owed his life to Thorns, as Rowly's dutiful disciple of solid county worth, here was the one thing that could hope to keep him there. It would have to be a great thing, if the tales were true, but this was great ; a miracle, as some said, but in this vista of promise there was room for all miracles at once. True, even love had not achieved it for those others gone before, but who knew what there had been behind to excuse ? He was certain that love could hold him, given the chance. And there would always be the *Querida*, dancing on the bay. . . .

Julian came up from the glaring strip of sand that edged the flow of the summer tide, taking the path beneath the garden wall and the old, tarred boat, until she came to the gate of the deserted house. The chest-nuts were now in heavy leaf, making of the garden a perpetual gloom, while the dark beech was so full that its trunk was out of sight behind the flowing copper skirts spread all around it on the grass. Luis had had the paths weeded and rolled. The creepered verandah had been cleaned and trimmed, so that the length of it was a green-framed gallery of views caught between the trees, from the soft marsh-country at the head of the bay to Cunswick Fell and the open sea beyond.

There were rugs along the weather-beaten tiles, and light, bright-cushioned chairs, but the rest of the house had been left untouched, except for the long French windows on the front, which had been washed and polished until they, too, had the glimmer and gloom of some mysterious sea.

She looked into the dusky, desolate rooms, isolated, it seemed, by something infinitely more separating than mere sheets of glass. She saw them vaguely, because the light on the bay was still before her eyes, the little crowd on the hot sand, the lines of the finished boat, and the eager brilliance of her owner's face. She thrilled yet with the sympathetic pride which hails creation moving into being across the face of day. There was still in her ears the long ripple of satisfied thirst with which the *Querida* took the tide, and the sound of the little clapping waves applauding her white sides. The tiny flag at her peak, stamped with the ram's horns, had dropped and fluttered, fluttered and dropped, with little, pistol-like cracks of salute. Huck had taken her out, in spite of the light and variable wind, and had run her across to the Fell and back by some magic of his own, catching at the invisible skirts of imperceptible airs. Luis and one of the Benthams had gone with him, but the Garnetts had preferred to watch from the shore. Now the *Querida* was below again at her berth, and Luis had rowed away from her side, but could not tear himself from the finished beauty of her, there at last before his eyes. She had looked huge in the little yard, and though she had dwindled visibly when run out beneath the sky, she still seemed swan-like and large in the narrow limits of the bay, and among the tiny pleasure-craft anchored aside; but, in point of fact, she was small enough for any lengthy cruise,

being of no more than ten tons, about thirty-five feet in length and nine and a half in beam. She was cutter-rigged, and had more cabin-accommodation than was usual in match yachts of her size. Luis had not gone to his grandfather's last extremes, but there was comfort of a sort below, ventilation and space, thanks to the skylight and the coach-house roof, berths ingeniously concealed, padded leather and panelling of lacewood and teak. Her tall, yellow mast of pitch-pine had come from America as it was, and had begun life in a Windermere yacht. The Benthams had worked upon her in a curious rivalry with other men's work which they had never seen, comparing her, through the medium of Huck, with Gaspar's yachts built by the same firm. Sometimes they were even a little confused as to which boat was actually under their hands, just as, sometimes, tangled in the net of Huck's memories, they were not quite sure whether it was Luis or Gaspar, darkening the door of the yard. They stood together on the sand, looking at the *Querida*, launched at last, as at something rather strange, almost as if they had never framed her, plank by plank. Luis was talking rather fast, his flashing smile coming and going on his dark face, and now and then Huck turned from the boat to look at him with satisfied eyes. The old man's heart sang within him as he stowed the sails. He was young again, with romance before him, instead of at his back, and the years that had been so tame to live had all of them slipped away.

Luis turned at last, and followed the Garnetts to the house. He missed Julian, now that he had done with the boat. He could not get to her too fast, hurrying up the beach and along the path like an eager boy. The *Querida*, perfect as she was, could wait for another

day. The season was getting on, but he would have plenty of time to know her through and through, long before the weather began to break and warn him off the bay. And there would always be next year, when it came, and Heaven knew how many years after that. . . .

On the verandah, Crane was serving tea, but Julian was still staring into the empty rooms. She started when Luis came up to her on his quiet feet, because his face—the face of so many others of his breed—had been reflected in the thick glass, dark with so much dusky emptiness behind. It was as if she had seen those other Spanish faces, gazing at her from within.

“Would you care to look over the house?” he asked, as they sat down. “I believe Crane has the key. It is rather a dear old place inside, though of course it is terribly tumbledown, by now. I am thinking of furnishing a few rooms, and having the stables done up. It would save me going to the inn.”

“Then you do not mean to leave Thorns, just yet?” Mrs Garnett enquired, setting down her cup, and drawing a note-book from a leather-bag. She had a meeting at six o’clock, and was already there in spirit, issuing firm decrees.

Luis laughed, but the question jarred. Everybody was always asking him that, even though he was constantly giving out that he had no intention of leaving Thorns—just yet. It was almost as if they could not believe, as though something wiser than they placidly denied his statement to his face, knowing the enemy to be within the citadel all the time.

“Not if I can manage to stay. I am quite getting into my groove, and beginning to feel my way about. Land-problems are my food and drink, just now. The

new man, too, is quite a success. We each teach the other the things that neither of us knows. Would you really care to see the house? "

She shook her head, making little, neat notes with her ivory fountain-pen.

"It would not interest me in the least, but I daresay Julian might like to look round. She acquired a taste for that sort of thing from Bill. You may go as well, Dick, if you will be ready to drive me home at half-past five."

But Dick shook his head, too, muttering something about "disreputable ghosts," and wandered away to the garden-wall. He had aged a good deal in the last few months, and the silence that had once implied strength seemed now to indicate a dull flaccidity of mind. He was still conscious of missing Bill, and the hopes that he had grown to represent. His loss meant another of the jagged gaps which mark the slow decline of life, as well as a disappointment better left unexpressed. Once, indeed, he turned back, when voices reached him from the empty rooms, as though to guard something that had been left in his charge, but he stopped before he had gone half a dozen steps. He could do nothing, if he went, and his wife would ask why he had changed his mind. She disliked people who changed their minds, so he returned heavily to the garden-wall.

The old house was not in the least glad to be awakened from its long sleep, but muttered and groaned like a drowsy veteran, hearing the play of children batter at his muffled ears, and feeling their running steps shaking his feeble frame as they pass. The floors, oaken and still sound, had nevertheless that curious sense of insecurity common to boards which have not been trodden for long. The atmosphere, behind the

mustiness of unrefreshed air, had something foreign about it that could be traced to nothing in the empty corridors or vacant rooms, where the paper peeled from off the walls. It came on them from corners after they had passed, or in a cloud through some abruptly-opened door, suggesting foreign, scented woods and silks, and southern, perfumed wine; such an atmosphere as must have dwelt in the cabin of Gaspar's last boat, which he had not lived to see. It was strangely possessive, considering the bare harbourage about which it clung, languorous, yet stirring, suggestive of other passions in other lands. There was no house that Julian knew that smelt anything like it; not even Thorns, for all its mystery, though owned by the same race; and certainly not Fallowfield, with its rose-leaves and the lavender *pouffes*, which you squeezed before you ran away. . . .

"I'm afraid your father was right about disreputable ghosts!" Luis apologised, with a laugh, pausing at the handle of a door. "I am not sure that I ought to have brought you here at all. Bill would have objected, I know. He was so keen upon environment and its effect, and this seems wrong for you, somehow—don't you think so, yourself? I don't believe your hair would ever shine on the walls. . . ."

She blushed, and they laughed together, but she moved on. She did not want to leave the house, just yet, because it was part of the new country in which she had set foot, one of the strange things calling to her, night and day. The dusky rooms aroused in her both mystery and delight.

"Do you mean that we must go back? But I should like so much to see it throughout. I used to ask Bill to bring me, but he always refused. I don't know why,

because he was fond of old places, as a rule. He said I should not like it, but he was quite wrong. It seems to me rather wonderful, and very sad."

"I find it wonderful, too," Luis said. Her speech had touched him with a thrill of joy. With Bill as guide, it was more than likely that she would have cared nothing about the house, wrapped in the Fallowfield atmosphere at challenge with another so strange. But she was not here with Bill. She was here with himself, responding, in a measure, as he responded in full, to those passionate influences from the past.

"I should like to be here on a rough winter's night," he went on, "when the sea gets close about the walls. They say it even comes into the garden, sometimes. It must be fine to see it under a moon, or not to see it, and yet know that it is there! I could sleep well on nights like those. When I furnish my rooms, I expect I shall be running down. . . ." He broke off with a half-ashamed laugh. "No, no, I must not give way like that! That was how my grandfather's trouble began.

"He must have been a disgrace to the neighbourhood, but he fascinates me, nevertheless. They say he used to leave Thorns at the dead of night, and gallop his coach all the way to the shore, the coach-horn going with hardly a stop. Then, at the first peep of dawn, he would be off down the bay in one boat or another, picking his way down the channel, or flying on a full tide, like a bird got up too early, or a moth stayed up too late. Sometimes, he would stop here for months together, and never go home at all. That's where the—the ghosts come in that you don't match! But as often as not he was away on a long cruise, doing his best to get himself drowned, but fate denied him,

every time. I've an idea, from what I've heard, that he really wanted it to come about. I believe he thought it would put an end to the curse. He isn't much to be proud of, but in a way he did fight . . . not much, perhaps, after the first, but he seems to be the only Spanish Huddleston who ever really faced the thing. He had a theory, you know, that they could be cured. There's an old story that says something of the kind. I got it from Johnny Ewbank, at the farm. One of us is to travel the old road, and knock at the old door . . . but none of this is new to you, I suppose? "

"It sounds new," Julian said, listening dreamily to the deep eagerness of his voice. "I have heard it, as you say, lived with it, as one does, with country tales, but it all seemed unreal and very far away. Perhaps it is the house, or you, or the two of you together, but to-day they seem different and alive."

They were upstairs, by now, in a long room that had three windows facing the sea. It was a narrow room for its length, so that one drew, as a matter of course, to the old panes, frosted with salt, and looked out and down upon the stretch of the bay. On wild nights, with the tide in the garden below, this room must have seemed like the deck of a ship, with the water not only before it, but around it and beneath.

He dusted one of the deep seats, and she sat down. He seemed to have forgotten that he had not meant her to stay.

"You know, the curse is on me, too. I can understand what my grandfather felt, and why he was always sailing away; but it is such a little curse, as yet—I can't persuade myself to feel alarmed! It seems almost like a pretty gift, a toy for a spoilt child, and I don't

see why it need be anything else. I ought to have more chance than Gaspar had, I think. He came into the place very young, and his father was a delicate, moody man, who can't have helped him over much. But I have a decent training behind me, and I've had Rowly to teach me, too, though I did not know it until he was dead. And there is always Gaspar himself as a warning, dear old thing! I could make a better fight of it than he did, I believe, in spite of the extra weight on the chain; but I do not mean to try, without your help."

She looked up at him without speaking, without change of colour or start, though she had not expected his last words, had scarcely, indeed, guessed that he had grown to care, for she had seen little of him since Rowly's death. Here, on his own ground, it seemed as though they had always belonged one to the other, and that she had never known any love but this.

"If you cannot care, I shall go away—perhaps not just now, but before very long. I should like to stay, partly because Rowly would be glad, if he knew; partly to annoy the people who are so sure that I shall go! You can keep me, if you choose, if you love me as I love you, but it will have to be a big love, you know." He threw out his hands in a foreign gesture which did not seem strange in the narrow room. "Darling, won't you try? I want so terribly to be kept!"

She smiled at the sudden flash of feeling and his boyish, pleading air.

"I don't think I need to try. I do care, though I resented it, at first. I had been so busy hating you for Rowly's sake. But I am not strong or particularly brave. Mother says that I am sentimental and weak, that Bill has never allowed me to stand alone. I do

not know that I could hold you, if you wanted to go. I could only go on caring until you came back."

He drew her up into his arms.

"You can't help but hold me! I believe you have held me ever since that day at the farm. I thought it was Myre and his medicines, or Rowly—poor old man!—but it must have been you. You are not afraid of your bad bargain—stamped as a bad bargain for more than three hundred years?"

"I am not afraid."

"There is something else." He frowned, seeming to hunt a forgotten thought. "It seems so long ago already, that extraordinary affair of the sheep! It is true, I suppose, but somehow I can't apply it to myself. You would not worry about that?"

She said "No," thinking of her mother's words—"I had a right, a supreme right," understanding them for the first time. They were very happy and brave in the narrow room, very sure that, no matter what the future might hold, the greater part of it must be rich and good. Each was certain that in the other would be found strength. . . . Below them, the *Querida* tugged at her mooring on the ebbing tide.

CHAPTER XVIII

THEY were to be married in the spring. Everybody knew now why Bill had gone away, and made no bones about saying so. To Bill himself, in Manchester, came only the echoes of this handling of his affairs. The main announcement was communicated by Dick.

The Garnetts made no opposition; indeed, there was little cause. The match was a good one, far better, of course, than any that a Faussett could have offered. There was nothing against Luis except a cloud of family tales and other people's reputations, that haze of doings off the normal and happenings out of the common, which—from the other side of the haze—is termed romance. For himself, there seemed everything to be said. Already he was generally esteemed. He had looks and brains, breeding and charm. He could have had a career; was there not Rowly's word for it, repeated more than once? Even Dick, hiding his disappointment in his own way, had to admit a fondness for him. Already Lettice was making use of him as a prospective son-in-law, and in his present state of general content found him almost as tractable as had been his gentler brother. The county at large considered that they were to be envied this surprise.

Luis found himself established, so to speak, by the sudden event. Nobody asked him, now, whether he was stopping on at Thorns. Later, indeed, they might ask it of somebody else, as those before them had done,

when Gaspar was always on their lips. For the present, however, and for some time to come, it was taken for granted that the matrimonial anchor would not drag.

Crane was pleased, although puzzled and troubled for Bill. He was not happy yet in a world that held no fussy little master to be petted and coerced, and Luis did not fill the void. He was jealous, too, of that dead master's dreams, and of his own control over the Mauve Room, but on the whole he was content. It might have been a great deal worse. This was no stranger that was coming, after all, and nobody need mind Miss Julian about the house.

The long, hot months got over at last, but they were followed by an autumn that seemed to have kept the summer's subtler essences of beauty, adding to them, by slow degrees, its own more noble richness of effect. Yet to Julian, during this prolonged spell, so continued that it was almost strange, it seemed, sometimes, that this was not England at all, certainly not the England she had seen with Bill. Occasionally she wondered, finding exotic beauty where all had been merely intimate and dear, whether she was looking at it through foreign eyes, Spanish eyes that had grown to love it against their will. She could not shake off the idea that about it all clung the influence of the narrow room, the suggestions of foreign odours and sensuous airs. The house beside the tide drew her again and again, holding, she came to think, the whole secret of Thorns therein embalmed. She forgot the clear, pearly air of those other rooms before which the white cherry bloomed; walking in an enchanted land where it was never quite light, having for its borders on all hands the aged, irrefutable sea.

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A big winter came hard upon the lingering, majestic autumn, so that almost in a night the face of the country was changed. The *Querida*, by weeks the last pleasure-boat to be seen, was berthed safe from any reaching tide. Not a single sail plumed the leaden bay, except at intervals and very far out, where the Pulton fishing-boats fought a living from the sea. And at Thorns, long before Christmas, there was snow. . . .

Luis ran up to town to see his own lawyer, and incidentally to make vague preparations for the spring. At that moment, however, he was perfectly convinced that there would never be any spring. The Mauve Room was to be re-done for the incoming of the bride, but it was impossible to take any steps while the snow drifted and blew against the blurred angles of the house, and all the men on the place were busy clearing the avenue and paths. And somehow, despite all his picturing, he could not finally see the room as anything but mauve. Purple stood for mourning, that colour of dull acceptance, sharing none of the dignity of harsher grief. It was no colour for a bride, and must, of course, be changed, as Rowly himself had wished it changed; yet it remained insistent, undisturbed, as if printed on the retina of the eye.

He had been abroad so much, in London at such scattered times, that he did not expect to see many whom he knew, but they seemed to spring upon him from all sides, as if chained and waiting for this hour. His grandmother's friends had been drawn from more than one nation, but most of them had belonged to one or other of those diplomatic centres through which the wires of international policies are run. It was good to hear of southern lands, with that wilderness of whirling snow still tormenting the background of his mind.

It braced him, too, mentally flaccid with discussions upon furniture and paint, to listen to the polished, balanced talk, hinting at national disaster on the wing, or at brilliant *coups* that none but the initiated would ever have the chance to admire. This was from the older men, whose tongues swung countries from hand to hand, as chess-pieces across their squares. The younger had for him a more sparkling if less stirring draught, in which the brilliance of embassy and legation frothed and laughed, raised in a brimming toast to the very eyes of Life Herself. . . .

None, either young or old, believed that he was lost to their particular world, scoffing at the notion that he had sunk himself for life into the rôle of contented country squire. They reminded him of his grandmother, whose ambition for him had stopped nowhere ; of Horne, who had apparently prophesied for him in vain. They whispered of posts always open to the right man, if the right man should apply through the right channels at the right time. For none of them had his life in the north any significance, still less any hint of opposing force. Marriage ? Well, why not, as long as it did not tie his hands or clog his feet ? But that he should settle for good in that impossible spot not to be found upon any map, and scarcely even to be observed of the eye of the sun, was not to be thought of at all. Other men had family places which dispensed with their valuable presence, and were not so very much the worse. Some day, when he was old, he could retire to Thorns, to potter among the human and other vegetables around ; but, at his age, with his influence and opportunities, his training and gifts, it would be little short of a crime.

There had been a temporary thaw on the day he

returned home, and all the land was a sullen, watery grey-white, with roads that were thick with mud and lumps of dirty snow, and a sky that lowered at the earth like an angry woman at her mate ; all of it waiting for a fresh, purifying fall, or the cleansing baths of sun and wind and rain, like a soul, sunk in the mire and apathy of late-concluded sin, that can neither, of its own accord, draw upon itself the dazzling mantle of redemption, nor renew the innocent radiance of its coloured youth.

Sleet, that most despicable compromise in the weather's store, began to fall with a kind of senseless uncertainty as he drove up to his door. The house, lamp-lit and quiet, seemed dim and uncannily hushed after the light and gaiety of town. The fires burnt with the solid excellence of first-class coal, reminding him of the sordid industrial centres from which it came. In the Andalusian villages they would be burning the scented hill-plants for fuel, mint and lavender, rosemary and thyme, brought in by the donkeys whose harness was tasselled with purple and red. There would be snow in Spain, too, but not everywhere, and not like this. In the south the sky would be transparent blue, high above the green of cypress, eucalyptus and palm. The oranges would be gold on the trees. After the occasional rain, the white and coloured faces of the houses would look very fresh and clean.

Snow and frost between them held the land all through January and February, so that getting about was difficult and lengthy, and generally trying to the temper. Being still in mourning, he did little but dine quietly with Rowly's old friends, shoot when the weather allowed, or put in an appearance at the political or

charitable efforts accustomed to his brother's support. He was still conscientiously attentive to the needs of the estate, although at times he felt strangely aloof, as if administering the affairs of some island in the Pacific. Most of his days, of course, were spent at Roselands; many hours with Julian alone. He was a charming lover, and his ardour spun for himself, as well as for her, rose veils against the bitter world without. She was rather silent with him, as she had never been with Bill, but they were happy together, nevertheless. It was as though something in her watched and waited, counting the strung jewels of these hours of content. It was he who talked, in crisp, easy language that was pleasant to hear. And always, before he left, he talked of Spain.

He told her, looking at the empty garden and the ring of grey sky, of the fierce Castilian sun, shining yearly for close on four thousand hours; of the fertile South, where, under the clear heaven, the irises and the almond-trees would be in flower, butterflies at play about the asphodels, oranges gleaming all over the land, and the sea a passionate blue.

In snow-white Seville, just about now, the flat roofs would be crowned with flowers, violets and carnations selling on the stalls, roses, geranium, and heliotrope to be seen. The corn would be getting up, the orange-trees bearing both flowers and fruit. The streets would be full of the cries of hawkers, tinkling of goat-bells, twittering of birds.

He talked of the green country of the Spanish Basques, its cider-orchards and fields of maize, its ancient, vine-trellised farms with their deep-sloping roofs; the difficult Basque language and strange titles; the handsome, reserved, conservative people, and their

traditions, their dances, their Pelota, and their Pastoral Plays. . . .

He told her of grim, treeless Navarre, and burnt, wind-swept Castile ; of villages with singing names ; of the white streets of Cadiz and the orange-groves of Granada ; of Carnival in Madrid and the Burial of the Sardine ; of Holy Week in Seville, the splendid cofradias and pasos, and the dances of the Seises ; of Moorish Cordoba, with its Court of Oranges and Hall of a Thousand Columns, its ancient watchman armed with rattle and spear ; finally, of San Sebastian, where the King had a summer palace and a fleet of yachts, and where Luis had handled his first boat on the waters of the Bay.

March was wet and wild, abnormally so, wreaking itself in gales and floods upon the miserable earth. It was in March that Dick fell ill. All the winter he had shown an unusual lack of vitality, an objection to exertion, a preference for sitting alone and still. Now he began to drag his feet when he walked ; presently, to be unable to walk at all. When she learned that this was the beginning of an undatable end, Mrs Garnett sacrificed her meetings for a whole week ; and went back to them again.

The wedding, too, was put off, and for more than a week. The shock of her father's illness reached Julian in her abstraction as she had not been reached either by Bill's pleading or his loss. Dick turned to her with a dumb reliance that could not be spurned, even though she risked the new happiness in her life, which seemed even now to flutter between her enclosing hands.

Luis rebelled, at first. There was no knowing how long the situation would last, and the wedding could

not be postponed for years. At Thorns, so short a distance away, she would be able to see her father every day of the week. She was usurping her mother's duty, he argued, grudging his wife to the furtherance of Mrs Garnett's schemes; yet knowing all the while that she took no place but her own. She begged for time until the edge had worn off the blow, until a suitable nurse could be found, until her father could bring himself to let her go. It would be only a matter of a few months, she said, and Luis yielded at last. In his fit of temporary soreness, he countermanded the order to the London upholsterers; for the time being, the Mauve Room could go on being mauve. But his annoyance and depression soon passed. April was coming, and in early April the *Querida* would unfold her wings.

April was not wild, but it, too, was wet, with the bleak, unreasoning drip of an old maid's tears, lacking the tempest-touch of passion which relieves and clears the soul. He sailed many a day through dreary, slanting showers, mocked by disheartened gleams of uncertain sun. In May, the Fallowfield cherry blossomed against a cold, grey sky, and June had a hard brightness, seeming always to imply that the wind was in the east. He grew almost to hate the bay in its continual unfriendly mood, yet could not keep away from the thrill of driving through the sea, the tug of the tiller as the sails filled and the boat stiffened in every inch. He had sailed to Ireland, by now, and many lesser trips besides, but even these breaths of the open were ceasing to fill his need. Huck watched him always, exulting when he looked beyond. For Huck's ardent desire, he could not look too far. . . .

One day, a Roselands groom rode after him to the beach. Miss Julian had asked for him, the man said, but, as far as he was aware, there was nothing wrong. Luis found his horse, and rode rapidly to the house. Julian came to meet him with a smile of apology on her lips.

"It wasn't a sudden impulse," she explained, as they walked between the sweet peas. "It was what they call a climactic effort. It is too bad to have spoiled your afternoon."

"I was startled, at first, but your man assured me everything was well. I hope your father is no worse? You look so tired."

The colour came into her face, and died again. It was true that she looked tired. Her eyes were heavy, and her mouth had a wistful droop.

"No, there is nothing fresh." She flashed him a pathetic little smile. "There isn't much sleep in your country, dearest! I miss it rather badly, because I used to sleep so well."

"You've been worrying!" He faced round on her, stopping in the path. "But, sweetheart, why? I am not going to die. I am not going to run away. Now, why?"

"Because I am a person of no character, as Mother always says. It is true. I am worrying. I am afraid—after all."

"You have not ceased to care?"

She shook her head, her lips trembling, her eyes filling, and he put out his hands, and drew her to him.

"No. Have you been thinking so? I did not want to trouble you with my silliness, that was all. It is like a woman, isn't it, to take endless pains to conceal a fact, and then to send miles for a person in

order to tell him? I was so sure that I could be noble and brave, and I am not brave at all! I am afraid, all the time. Sometimes, when you are down at the bay, and Father is asleep, I walk across to Thorns and wait by the edge of the park. I look and listen, and listen and look . . . and then I steal away like a thief, for fear you should catch such a miserable, chicken-hearted wretch. Crane *did* find me, once, and he carried it off so well—asked if I had come for the lilies in the wood, as I always used to do. We went and gathered them together, and he talked of Rowly all the time. He wanted to send me back in a car . . . it was nice of him not to make me feel ashamed. But I despise myself. I wake at night, and wait for . . . things . . . to come along the road. I wonder my unhappy ears do not stretch from here to Thorns. I sit at my mirror, like the Lady of Shalott. . . .”

“*Alto!*” He put his hand over her mouth. “Your father’s illness is telling on your nerves.”

“Perhaps.”

“There is no perhaps. You are not yourself. Marry me, and I will burn the boat.”

“There would still be—what I don’t hear—in the night.”

“I’ll sell the flock—no, I can’t do that. It is part of the entail. Let us go abroad.”

“Cowardy custards, running away from a . . . running away. Rowly did not run away.”

“We should be cowards together, so there would be no room for reproach.”

“I could not leave my father. Besides, I believe I am a stay-at-home in more senses than one. I took a very big step when I ran away, mentally, to you. I rather think I am meant to stop at that. But you could go.”

"Without you?" His tone was full of hurt surprise. He held her away to look into her face.

"You want to go, don't you? I can feel you pulling, all the time. I seem to be losing you, all the time. Perhaps, if you went away, I should recover my common sense. Perhaps, in my dreams, I should not always and always see. . . ."

"Dear! Do you wish to give me up?"

"Oh, no—*no*! But perhaps it would be only fair. I am keeping you here. I am making you wait——"

"Why, I am positively rooted, by now! Already I am President of everything you can imagine, including the local Poultry Show. In any case, I couldn't leave you. Think of all the trouble I had to find you, and how long it was before you would look at me when you *were* found! If I turn my back, you'll be scuttling away out of my country into your own. I can't afford to take the risk."

He coaxed her into laughing temporarily at her fears, though he could not break her resolve to stay with Dick. He could still be patient, however. The summer, such as it was, was not more than half-way through; and there was always the open sea beyond the bay.

July and August were grillingly hot, as if the whole delayed heat had concentrated in these months, until one almost sickened and recoiled. The sands were crowded with pleasure-seekers, enormous trips for the day, Sunday School and every other variety of treat, filling the boats, climbing the cliffs, hanging on the walls of Garden Nook itself. During these weeks, Luis grew to have a complete horror of the place. He sailed early, before the trains brought the people in,

or late, running many risks on the sands, after dark ; but sometimes he was forced to take the tide in the day, and embarked or disembarked in a crowd, often pestered by demands for a trip, and attempts at bargaining which turned him white with wrath. Huck and his own fierce bearing protected him to some extent, but he was never free, because the same trips never came again, and the next contingent badgered him as its predecessor had done. When they were safely out of reach of the mischievous rowing-boats dotting the glaring sea, Huck would talk of the *Gaviota*, of the *Alondra's* trip to Algiers, the *Golondrina's* trip to Spain. . . .

Dick was worse, during these months, and Julian was much tied. Mrs Garnett had a zenana sale in Witham . . . a praiseworthy undertaking, with excellent financial results.

In September, he had another offer from Madrid. Horne wanted him as first secretary, but, though he wrote as kindly as ever, the letter hinted, straightly enough, that this excellent chance might also be the last. Luis, looking across his quiet park, heard the call as a blown trumpet in a desert land. The summer was behind him, with those crude, blatant days which had seemed to coarsen all romance, but winter was before him, the northern winter which had the iron sunk in its soul. . . . He went to Julian, the same day.

"I am fortunate to have the chance," he said. "It is surely foolish to refuse." He grew more eloquent as he talked, more foreign in his gestures and the inflections of his voice, but in the end he came back again to short, unemphasised speech. "This may be

the beginning of other and greater things. Marry me, and come out to play at kings and queens. Over there, you will forget about our friends on the fell, and if I feel I must run to the ends of the earth, I promise that you shall run, too. I have been very patient, you will admit. If you love me, you will come."

She looked across to a half-open door, through which she could see her father on his couch. There was a book on a rest at his side, but he was not looking at it. He did not appear to be looking at anything at all. The stillness which had made him so restful a companion was now terrible and ominous, suggesting an evil spell.

Mrs Garnett could be heard reading aloud the report of her own speech at some meeting which had elected her to the chair. Her daughter listened for a moment ; then turned back.

"I will not leave him," she said. "That is all he would ever have from her, you know. I may be regretably silly, as she says, but I can give him more than that. He never smiles for anybody but me. I could not go away thinking he would look—as he is looking, now—all the rest of the time until the end. But you must certainly go. Perhaps you will come back for me, when—when I am alone, though I do not know that you will be wise. I do not think that I belong to any place but this."

He began to fight the point again, passionately, but in a low tone, remembering Dick, whose head turned once with incredible slowness when the word "go" had found its way too often through his door ; but Julian was not to be moved.

He had left England before September was out.

CHAPTER XIX

ONE afternoon in the June following, Julian took her little car, and motored down to the house on the shore. The day was gentle and warm, and the shadowed garden was very cool and quiet. She noticed that the paths were still kept weeded, that the grass was cut and the verandah swept, and wondered whether Luis had left orders to that effect. Sitting on the turf at the terrace-edge, she looked out dreamily to the bright strips of bay showing between the trees. There were no trips into the place, that day, and no echo of voices came to her from the sands.

It was a month, now, since her father's death, and within the week the news had been sent to Madrid. She was beginning to wonder why she did not hear from Luis.

Hitherto, he had written with the utmost regularity, his letters, indeed, growing more ardent as time went on ; for though, at first, his regret at parting had been balanced by delight in his return to Spain, the latter seemed to have waned, of late, leaving him full of longing for herself. Now that she was free to go to him, if she wished, she wondered at his silence, however short.

She wondered many things, as she sat with her back to the empty house, feeling the sun touch her kindly from time to time. She thought of Luis with great tenderness, wishing him with her, at her side, but he seemed to have receded very far. If he came for her,

she would go with him, no matter where, but she could not frame a picture that was anything but vague. She did not feel as though she might be going away. She was still physically and mentally weary after the long strain, letting the days pass over her in a silent, steady ebb and flow that could not contemplate any change.

She had long ceased to fret about the sheep, and the land had never again seemed to her as if she saw it through foreign eyes. The house behind her awoke in her no thrill. She would not have entered it if she could, knowing that, for the present, at least, the enchantment was gone. Perhaps it would come again, when Luis came. She was too tired to feel exhilaration at the thought, yet she longed for his vivifying presence and touch; and then remembered that with the passion of love might also return the fear. She moved her hands restlessly when she thought that, and then let them fall slack once more. She had no word that he was coming, as yet, and she did not feel that she was going away.

Down the shaded drive she saw a figure turn in at the gate, and hurry towards her with catching strides, as though some violent emotion had left the head careless of the feet. A thin envelope crunched and crackled in its grasp. When it came out of the dimness to the terrace-foot, she saw that it was Huck.

His face was one quiver of astonishment, excitement, and delight. As he came to a halt at Julian's feet, he drew his hand across his eyes, as if to assure himself of some reality that might too easily prove to be a dream. The foreign paper crumpled in his passionate grip. He looked like a man upon whom some strange and unexpected gift had dropped from the clouds, all but annihilating him in its fall.

Luis had continued him in his pay, and had also left him the *Querida* for his summer use, but as yet Huck had done little towards plying her for hire. He felt such trip-running to be degradation to the boat, and was anything but civil to his fares, so that the *Querida*, in spite of her beauty and size, was not greatly in demand. He almost lived on her himself, running about the bay as long as the tide allowed, like a fretting dog hunting his master with lowered nose. He saluted Julian with an excited jerk.

"Begging your pardon, miss, but I saw you drive in, and I wanted to ask if you knew! I'd this letter from Mr Luis by the afternoon post. It's to say he wants the boat over in Spain. We're to make for Lisbon as fast as we know how. But perhaps you'll have heard about it from himself?"

Julian looked at the letter with a touch of jealousy at her heart. "No, I have not heard," she said, and Huck shuffled uncomfortably with his feet.

"There'll be word for you, at home, sure enough, come on the same mail. I'll let you know when we sail, if there's anything you'd care for me to take. I doubt we shan't get off until next week; there'll be a deal to see to, in the time. There's the course to look up—not but what I know it well enough, and we've a cabin-load o' charts! Mr Luis spent half his time working out different runs, just as Mr Gaspar used to do. We've planned this trip more than once, ay, and another as is a sight bigger job altogether . . . but we shan't get off till next week. I've the stores to see to, and such like, and to look out a couple o' decent hands to see her safely through the Bay."

"The Bay?" Julian looked startled, and Huck laughed a broad laugh of triumphant content.

"She'll tackle it all right, you needn't fear! And we'll only take it in passing, so to speak, this way round. We'll get our fill of it, coming back."

"Will that be soon, do you think?" Julian asked, and at once Huck looked away, crushing the letter closer in his palm, as if fearful that it might flutter from his hand to hers.

"Nay, I don't know, I'm sure. That's no business of mine. My orders are to get her out as fast as she'll sail, and after that the master'll handle the job. I never looked for a bit o' luck like this! I was that down and set fast for something to do, I took to keeping this here place tidy and straight, in case he should think to give us a surprise. It would have been just like Mr Gaspar, if he had. You'll come to see us off, miss, if you can get down?"

She parted from him at the gate, leaving him still as eager and excited as a child, and drove home slowly, longing to hurry, yet fearing to find nothing at the other end. In spite of Huck, she was not so sure about that letter by the same mail. This demand for the boat could only mean that Luis had no thought of returning, just yet. No doubt he wanted her for the coming season by the sea, when the King himself sailed at San Sebastian, and there was a fashion in yachts; but within the next mile she remembered that Huck had said he was ordered to Lisbon, and added that wonder to all the other wonders of the afternoon. The port made little difference, however. She was quite certain that Luis was not coming back, just as she was certain that she would never go away.

The letter was lying on a table at the back of the hall. Coming in, blinded by the sun, she told herself that she saw it in imagination only, and

experienced a second shock of surprise when she found that it was really there. She glanced about her before she took it up and carried it upstairs, but there was nobody in sight. Her mother was probably busy at her desk. The house seemed strangely quiet without the man who had always been quietness itself.

Luis wrote of him with affectionate regret.

"I wish I could have been with him at the last, although I was never as much to him as he was to me. I think he lost his hold on life when Rowly died and Bill went away. I wonder, sometimes, how far I was responsible for either event. Perhaps Rowly had more ground than he knew for his fear lest I should hold myself to account. Perhaps my coming really *did* bestir the family fate! As for dear old Bill—what do you think? Would you, in any case, have turned aside to look at life through other eyes than his?

You will have no excuse now for keeping me out of my own. I am coming to you, of course, but not exactly at once. I will tell you why, presently . . . or perhaps I will not tell you why. . . .

You have not forgotten, have you?—you are not ceasing to care? Your letters elude me, somehow—dear, wistful, appealing things, reminding me always of the pale sun which was my first impression of yourself! In this glaring land they come to me like your cool little hand laid against my lips.

I wonder if you have guessed how soon I ceased to be satisfied with Spain? At first, I was so glad to be back, intoxicated by the sight and smell of it, and the music of its speech; full of my own importance and visions of glorified heights reached by a short succession

of brilliant leaps. And then I began to dream of England, to long for England . . . what have you done to me, between you, you and Thorns? Since Rowly died, I have no trumpeter to blow royally upon the pompous theme of my Career. I make mock of it now, turning my eyes across the sea to my home in the cool north-west. I have no use any more for positions of trust and the reins of government in my hand. I want the little blocked-in life and all the fussy little things that Rowly used to do. Most of all I want you and the quiet English days and nights.

"Is this what Gaspar felt, I wonder, when he was away from Thorns, or is it just that I have learned my lesson more thoroughly than he? I have had such splendid teachers—Rowly and your father and good old Bill . . . and two of them are dead, and one gone away, which is much the same. *Ay de mi!* Is that the price of my restitution and deliverance? It makes me very humble and small.

"This cannot be just what Gaspar felt, I am sure. I am so content at the thought of Thorns, so filled with a delicious peace when I picture my life there, spent with you. And yet, because I am so afraid that, after all, I may be wrong, deceiving myself all the time, I am going to weave a big spell, to try a big cure, before I risk your final happiness in a Spanish Huddleston's hands.

"I have behaved very badly, of course. Horne, merciful soul, takes it to mean that I am still far from well, and must therefore be allowed, if I choose, to inconvenience all the powers that be. He has been very kind, so kind that, if I were not so sure that I am right, I would try to fight the call of Thorns. But

there can be no doubtful temptation in this, because it is just the calm, sweet voice of my own home. Nevertheless, to make doubly sure, I intend to try the prescription they whisper about the land . . . *¡Grandes males, grandes remedios!* It is not an unpleasant one, after all!

"You will hear that I have sent for the *Querida* and Huck. I need the boat, this once, for the project I have in hand, but afterwards, sweetheart, I will have done with the bay. I am quite sure that I shall rest and be good, when I am through with the cure. I do not know yet when I shall be with you, but towards the end of September you may look for me every day. Long for me a little, so that I may be drawn to you all the faster on my road. I wish to God I were with you now, and our new life already begun, but I cannot fail to come to you in the end. I am so sure that I have found the right way.

"This cannot be what Gaspar felt, can it? . . ."

All the evening, Julian went a little dizzily, hearing the words of the letter sing in her ears. For the moment, it had brought Luis so close that the months before his coming seemed already past. The very strangeness of the letter wrapped her round with the enchantment she had thought to be lost. She wished he had told her his plans, but perhaps he would do so when he wrote again, or she might light upon the truth from Huck, when she saw him before he sailed. There was to be a last trip, it seemed, before Luis came finally to Thorns. She smiled tenderly at the fantastic phrases in which it was announced, as a mother smiles at a child's promise to be good—to-morrow, perhaps, or, perhaps, next week. She did not know what he meant by the cure, though some speech of his in the house by the shore

fretted a chord in her mind, but she was too absorbed in the future to care to track it down. He was coming, not to take her, but to stay with her. She had been right in thinking that she was not meant to go away. She would never go farther from home than a few miles here or there.

But in her first sleep there came to her the departed thing which she had feared. From the hall at Thorns she strained her eyes into the night, the empty night that yet threatened and promised and pushed onward an inexorable fate. She stood there, it seemed, for years, cold with all the chills of winter and creeping draughts, of sickness and weakness and advancing age, seeing a thousand times what never came beyond the dark fence of the night, hearing what never moved or pattered on the gravelled drive. And then, at last, when she had grown to long for it to come, and yet was least able to bear it when it came, the horror drew into sight before the open door, with dim, woolly backs and sides, and little, trotting feet. . . .

She found herself out in the middle of the room, with her mother's arms about her, and the echo of her own cry in her ears. She clung silently, as she would have clung to any object that would have kept her from falling and broken the reality of her dream. When she ceased to tremble, she went so still and cold that her mother took her to her own room.

"I know what it was," she said, meeting the girl's eyes as she looked up, dumbly, from the bed. "It will always be like that, you know. There was a letter from him, this afternoon. I suppose that means that he is coming back? Well, I tell you it will always be like that. I know, because I had to face it myself. I could have continued to face it, too, if I had been allowed.

That is the difference between you and me. You will go to pieces under it—as you know.”

Julian gave a long, sobbing sigh, and a faint look of compassion came into her mother’s face. She put her hand for a moment on the girl’s head.

“It is a big thing that is wanted for this; not infatuation or enchantment, or a mere bond of personal charm, but love, which is only another name for the highest strength of all. You were not meant for big issues. You should have married Bill. He has carried you in his arms so long that you cannot use your own feet, much less support another on an evil road. He would have gone on carrying you; he would have kept life from hurting you and making you afraid. I do not know whether you intend to see this affair through. I cannot imagine that you will ever get as far. Perhaps you may be saved from it at the eleventh hour.”

Through the months following they did not mention the subject again. Julian saw Huck start for Spain, but gleaned nothing more than she had had from him at first, and after that there was no word of him or Luis or the boat. She slept with her mother, night after night, and dreamed of the Fallowfield cherry in full bloom.

CHAPTER XX

BILL awoke and lay wondering, for in his sleep he had seemed to hear something that he had not heard for two years. It was over two years, indeed, since he had left Fallowfield, and he had been back only once—on the day when Dick Garnett was laid in the grave. He had seen Julian, that day, but he had scarcely realised her presence. They had been dim to each other, mere images of the past, as if the many hours they had spent together had not been really lived, but only read of in some long-ago forgotten book.

He had learned much besides how to grub under cars. Ney loved him, for his surface cheerfulness never changed. He was popular, too, even influential, after a manner peculiarly his own, and which had nothing to do with business, *as* business, at all. Yet he had learned the jargon and punctilio of the trade. He was alert, clear-witted, up to time, rid of the old *laissez-faire* and serene ease marking the man living each moment as slowly as he could, because each was so rich and fine.

A casual observer would have said that he was now awake, where before he had been drifting and asleep, but he himself knew that he was really dead, as all are dead who have lost touch with the world of their dreams. The machines, indeed, brought him some little comfort, with their illusion of life that he could create at will. Ney was a wise old thing, he told himself, sometimes.

He knew the inner secret of those puzzles of fire and steel.

From the house in which he lay there was no sound of any kind at all, and in the dark street just below the tram-cars were not yet at work. Behind him, and on all sides, the houses stretched away to the heart of the city, the beat of which, never really hushed, came to him on an intermittent pulse. But that, though it had disturbed his sleep at first, had no power to awaken him now. The sound to which he had opened his eyes belonged to the real life which he had lost—the whistle of a shepherd herding his sheep on the fell.

It was so accustomed, so natural, that when it came again to his wakened ear he did not even start. It was faint, almost elfin in tone, elfin-sweet in its long-drawn, musical curves, elfin-sharp in its ending flicks of command; yet it could not be so very far away, for after each significant call he could hear the scurry and rush of huddled sheep gathering before the wise brain and velvet feet of some invisible dog. He told himself, as he listened, that he was miles from any fell, that the wet street lay outside, with its shining steel rails, that by no chance could there really be either shepherd or sheep; yet knew that he heard both, accepted both as facts that even vision could not make more real. He felt neither fear nor surprise, but a longing came over him, after a while, growing in strength when at last the whistle ceased. All the inner springs of his dead self were unsealed by the call of that ghostly shepherd on an aerial hill. He knew now that he wanted the green land which he had looked upon and loathed. He knew that he could feel all that he had once felt, should he return. It was September, in which, as a rule, no new hopes are sown, though for the corn it is

the month of resurrection in the north. This was resurrection, too, this warm gladness and desire to feel. When the first tram-car lumbered up the road, he was asleep, dreaming that the harvest-wains went by.

With his morning letters there was one from Crane. He had written, at intervals, ever since Bill had left, with a curious mixture of professional reserve and ebullition as from man to man. The letter of to-day had something of both, but it had something else as well, that suggestion of terror calling in the dark, which Luis had so often sensed at Thorns.

"All as you would wish at Fallowfield, I think, and the hay crop got in nicely, as you would hear. Witham Show yesterday, with a good attendance, and a fair lot all round. I went over with Martin, having always had a bit of an eye for stock, as no doubt you know. I was glad to meet many folks who still had a good word and a kind memory for him that is in his grave.

"This is to tell you, sir, that I am uneasy about Them. No, they have not been down, but they are low on the fell for the time of year. Ewbank says they are always getting into the meadows, though so far they have not been into the park. They stand about a good deal, very quiet, looking to the west.

"You may have heard that the master is coming home, and I suppose that means the wedding very soon. We shall be very glad to see him back. It is dull enough, as you may think, with the house so quiet, and nobody about. The Mauve Room is settled for at last, though I can't think that I shall ever like anything else as well. The master sent orders for the upholsterers to come about October 1st. Miss Julian, I am glad to say, looks better than she has done for a while, Mr Dick's illness having tried her a good deal. But she is not

quite our Miss Julian of the old days, and I think she might have done better for herself elsewhere. Asking your pardon, sir, I'm sure.

"We expect the master any day now, though he couldn't give us the exact date. He never mentioned his route, either, but perhaps he did not think to say. I've a fancy he means coming back by sea. He had Huck follow him to Spain, along with the boat, some time about June, which looks a bit like something of the sort. Huck was rarely set up, so I heard. He took the master's going very hard.

"Mr Bill, sir, if you could manage to come, I'd be very glad and obliged. I wish They didn't take so long to make up their minds. It's that which gives me the jumps, but perhaps they have to wait for orders, just like everybody else. I'm worrying in case Miss Julian should begin to fancy anything queer. She's often about the park, and she's very easy upset. I wish you'd manage to come, Mr Bill. . . ."

Ney looked across at him as he sat, thinking.

"Any thing wrongin that hobgoblin country of yours?"

"I'm not sure, but perhaps it would be as well if I went to see. You can spare me, can't you, for a short time? I'll get off by the afternoon train."

"You can't be allowed on the railway, my boy, with all the poor souls who have to travel in a bunch. Looks as though you didn't trust your own trade. Why not run through on the new-pattern Ney? She hasn't been seen on the road as yet."

"Thanks, but I'm going to Thorns, not Fallowfield, you know. I don't think I'd care to risk her—up the park."

Ney's mouth opened.

"You don't mean to say . . . not a second time . . . *already*?"

"I can't tell you that, because I don't know, myself. Crane's fidgeting, that's all, and seems to think he would like to have me near at hand."

"Well, I'd rather you kept out of it, if I'd the right to insist. The last man was your godfather, but this other is no concern of yours. You've been bothered enough, and you're only just beginning to pull round. I say again, I'd rather you kept out, but of course I know you won't. Only a pack of fools would believe such d—d rot, but you can believe anything—up there. I did, myself."

Bill laughed, already deep in a guide.

"How do we know what we can believe?" he said. "When you're up against it, there's not so much difference between the real and the unreal, after all."

He had telegraphed to Crane, and Martin met him with the dog-cart from the Hall. The house had been re-staffed for the master's return, and many of the old servants were back. Rowly's pampered menials did not thrive under other people's rule. Winder, however, had been shaken by the strain of the long mystery surrounding the former owner's death, and preferred to run an unromantic livery stable elsewhere. Martin was now head of the stable-yard, as grim as ever, as unafraid of the terrors stalking quivering flesh and quailing soul.

The cornfields were losing their gold in the grey of the dusk. There would be a moon, after a while, and the big sheaves would look like gold ladies and their grooms setting to partners down the yellow aisles. Thorns had mist before it when they saw it from the

road, a long swathe against the front of the house, like a soft bandage across its eyes. It seemed to Bill that it had covered its face in the sanctity of mourning, so that nobody might see its tears.

It was close upon eight o'clock. Martin muttered something as they turned in at the gates, and Bill caught his breath. The whole park was full of sheep coming and going under the hedges of the mist, so that there seemed ever more and more, as if from world's end to world's end was peopled with the flock. Through the twists of the avenue they could see a press of soft backs ringing the shrouded house. As before, they made no sound. There was no voice from the park, no voice from the fell, supreme above the autumn's winding-sheet, where the last daylight faintly smiled along the tops. Nothing came to the ear but the shuffle and scurry which Bill had heard in the Manchester night.

The horse had checked within the gates, and began to back, trembling and snorting and wild with fear, yearning for its stable so near at hand, yet driven by panic from the terror that lay between. Both men climbed down, and went to its head. The lodge-keeper came to his door, drawn by the clatter of hoofs and the scraping of wheels. His frightened wife peeped from behind, with the children close at her skirts. And in and out, through the trees and the fantastic vapour winding among them like torn ribbons or wandered banks of cloud, the grey shapes hurried and pressed, passing and re-passing, with soft, panting breath, and little, scuffling, padding feet.

While they waited, clinging to the horse, and wondering whether they should try to proceed, they heard steps coming from the house, running human steps

which dodged and checked on the soft avenue road as if continually rounding something in their path. Bill recognised them at once, for he had heard them before under circumstances much the same, and he was not surprised when Crane, wearing a cap, and a light overcoat over his black clothes, came into sight between the darkening trees. With a quick salutation, he laid his hand on the rein, breathing heavily and very fast, and began to back the horse on to the grass behind the wall. Martin, puzzled but consenting, helped him without a word.

"I saw you on the road," he said to Bill, in a low, hurried voice that seemed afraid of being overheard. "I doubted the horse wouldn't come up, so I thought I'd run down to meet you at the gate. Martin had a job to get him to start, though They hadn't begun to show up, by then. There's something different about them to-night that I've never noticed before, and I'm not sure what it means. They're round the house as usual, of course, but in a different way. They're all facing to the west!"

As he spoke, there came a sort of forward flow among the eddying shapes, and then, almost at once, a compact body of them came into view, making steadily for the gates. Crane whistled between his teeth.

"I thought so!" he muttered, with a shake of excitement in his voice. "I'd an idea it would be that. That's why I backed the trap in here, to be out of the way. *They're making for the sea!*"

They were certainly making for somewhere strange, the ancient Thorns flock that had never left its ancient heaf but for one purpose alone. The whole flock was there, it seemed, the whole four thousand, countless in the dying light, emerging from all sides as if from under

curtains lifted to let them through, to form a close mass set for some distant point. They came on towards the gates, a sea of shorn fleeces and woolly backs, flecked with the grey-white of melancholy faces and the inky curls of horns, so that the Huddleston crest seemed to be carved times without number on the steel-grey shield of the night. To the pattering of their hoofs and their own quick, frightened breath, the sheep swept out past the lodge, and took the road to the sea.

The horse had been mad with fright, at first. It had taken all three men to keep it from bolting through the trees, and more than once the trap had had a narrow shave against some solid trunk or the high park wall, but long before the huge procession was past, the poor beast stood still, shaking and hanging its head, now and again shoving its muzzle into Martin's arm, as he muttered a stream of comforting sounds. When the last sheep was through the gates, they saw Johnny Ewbank standing on the opposite side of the road.

He was straight from the harvest in his working clothes, and he tapped a yellow straw against his excellent teeth. He stood very still, gazing after his flock with wise, reflective eyes, watching that which he knew best in all the world strike suddenly into unbelievable paths. When he saw Bill take the reins, he came forward to the wheel, and, bidden by a look, mounted with Martin behind. The horse, turned in the wake of the sheep, and away from the comfort of its box, stecked and tried to swerve, but was persuaded on by voice and hand. Crane had his foot on the step when he saw a little black body streaking down the drive, with a feathery tail curled close between its inky legs. It was the Cocker, visibly frightened out of his canine wits; visibly determined, also, not to be left behind.

Crane picked him up and shoved him into the cart, where he fell upon Bill in an ecstasy of welcome that was yet suppressed to an occasional explosive whine, as if he, too, knew that the Great Silencer was abroad.

The sheep kept to the road in one solid flow pressed between hedge and hedge, tailing into the twilight like the farthest glimpse of a mountain stream. Bill strained his eye ahead, and his mind farther still, but could not guess how far they reached. The whole night seemed full of the click and scrape of little hoofs, sharper now on the metalled road, but otherwise there was no sound except that of panting breath. As a rule, a travelling flock fills the air with mourning and complaint, but this went silently, as if rendered dumb for the time. A little cloud of dust came up about them as they moved, drifting back to the men in the rear. In the quiet country on either hand, little yellow lights sprang up in cottage and farm, some playing will o' the wisp in the hollows by the beck, some signalling from the fell-sides. Here and there, a house by the road showed a gleaming door-way in which staring faces were set—frightened faces, like those they had left at the lodge. In the little gardens the purple Michaelmas daisies looked wan and wet.

They met nobody as they went down to the sea. Of all the strange things of that strange night, that seemed to Bill the most strange. The Shepherd who was dogging the flock to meet the incoming tide had seen to it that their way before them was clear.

Passing Roselands, he had a sudden panic lest Julian should be anywhere at hand. She could not help but hear, he thought, she who had listened—ah, so much oftener than he knew!—for the significant message of those clicking hoofs. But the garden was empty,

and the house, at which he looked with regret for an old friend as well as for a love that was lost, seemed desolate and still. He wished, as he went by, that her sleep to-night might be very quiet and sweet. She was asleep already, if he had but known, and dreaming that the Fallowfield cherry had bloomed a second time, that year.

The little town, too, was in bed, when they came to the sea, and they passed unchallenged along the deserted front. Gaspar's house lay drowned in the pool of gloom made by chestnut and beech, and the builders' yard beyond was one with the shadow of the rock. The bay was wrapped in a pall of mist and night, but, as the ghostly vanguard dropped to cross the sands, the moon came up behind.

It was a flat, golden moon, like an unstamped coin, and beneath it the sands went a hard, light brown, with slashes of inky black, showing the channels of the rivers like scars, and the deep sandbanks with their shelving sides. The hill behind the village was black, too, where the climbing woods pushed little ebony spear-points into the moonlit sky. And Cunswick Fell, across on the distant edge of the earth, sharp-cut against the farthest sky of all, ran down like the crouching back of a waiting beast to the faint gold line of sea.

They went by the recognised fords, where the stakes stood out as guides across the channel-beds. Bill drew the horse to a halt, and watched the flock go down until the whole of it was strung like a desert caravan across the reaching waste. Even there, in the emptiness of sky and sand, it looked endless and immense, terrifying, too, because so purposeful and intent. There was no straggling, no loitering, no uncertainty or dread. The sheep moved forward always in their

closely dovetailed ranks, exactly as a well-driven flock moves before well-trained dogs.

Bill asked the tide, but nobody knew it. It seemed far enough off, as yet, though every now and then there came the little cold blast of wind which blows from the face of moving waters where the wind is always fresh. Otherwise, the night was warm and still, strangely so for late September, when that coast is often beaten by gales and harried by heavy tides. The sheep were forging ahead, and Bill urged the reluctant horse in their train. The trap swayed perilously on the beach, and then rolled along the firm sand. The horse broke into a slow trot. Behind them, the moon caught the unshuttered windows of Gaspar's house, so that they flashed through the drooping trees like the eyes of the past, opened to behold the mystery of this hour.

The sheep were moving very fast, far faster than had appeared from the shore, and they gained on the dog-cart all the time. The horse would not face the channels without Martin at its side, so that he had to wade at its shoulder, clinging to the shaft. Johnny, too, often jumped to the ground, for the trap was heavy with the pull of the sand. The Cocker shivered, and curled himself to sleep on Crane's knee. Bill began to dream as he drove, in the fixed, unwavering strangeness of it all. Sometimes it seemed to him that a little, old figure trotted beside the wheel, for whom the Fallowfield garden still grew her favourite flowers. It seemed quite impossible, now, that he had ever believed her really dead. In Manchester, he had learned to believe and to bear the thought; but now—why, once he even reached down his hand. . . .

Cunswick Fell was coming up to them, showing its

smooth, green sides, which were black in the moon, and the dim, white road running over it like a girdle, binding Cunswick to the town beyond. Cunswick itself lay back in a curve of the bay, with the regular lights of its front still twinkling like the portholes of a distant ship. They lost it as they turned to the west, the tired horse answering mechanically to the rein.

A big cloud was drifting out of nowhere towards the flat, gold coin, like a senseless destiny directed against a noble, useful life. The wind was colder and stronger now, and there was a touch of salt on their lips. The sheep were already landing on the grassy slopes, dotting the foot of the fell with clusters of grey-white. Between the fell and the channel of the Wythe, curling in a silver streak right across the sands from Arneshead itself, an iron finger rose from a thin, black line, which, in the day, was the brown knife-edge of a long, stone weir. The men got down from the cart, and Martin unyoked the weary horse. Bill walked to the farthest point of all, and looked across the sea. It seemed to him, after he had watched for a time, that the moon flashed on the white breast of a sail, but it came no nearer, and he was never quite sure. As he went back, a wind sprang up out of the south-west, and called as a herald calls, and along the foot of the fell, rippling and hissing over the bay, the tidal wave drove in.

Crane had set the cushions of the trap in a sheltered place, and the watchers threw themselves on the ground. They did not talk. Speech would have meant question as to why they were there at all, and into the utter unreason of the whole affair they could not afford to enquire. Presently, the gold coin slid into the cloud as an actor slips behind the scene, and the bay went out as if smudged by a ruthless hand. On all sides

the sheep were lying down; they could hear their breathing through the dark. The night sank slowly into a dull black. The tide was flowing strongly now, with a stiff breeze at its back. The moon—incomprehensibly, it seemed—never came out of the cloud.

That same evening, before the sun went down, Luis stood alone on the *Querida*, ready for getting under way. Huck had dropped overboard into the boat below, but he had gone reluctantly enough, and even now he still kept alongside, as if unwilling to let the yacht slip from under his hand.

They were off the Pulton front, and the windows of the town facing west were all alive with the dropping sun, so that the length of it looked like one crystal palace of shimmering glass. To leeward was Cunswick Fell, covering the entrance to Gaspar's bay, at present empty of the tide. Behind them was open water, heaving golden into the vague sky.

At Huck's back were the men with whom he had sailed the *Querida* to Spain. They had been paid off, and though Huck himself had not shared their fate, he was to be left at Pulton for the night. Luis wished to sail to Arneshead alone.

He looked over the side at his little crew with a pleasant sense of brotherhood and pride. In all the faces, as their eyes met, was the consciousness of an undertaking safely carried to an end which might never again enter the scope of their lives. They were all very brown, very hard, very content with themselves and the good little boat successfully through her cruise. For their road from Spain had been the old Armada road, when Drake had shut the door of the

English Channel at its heels, and hounded it to the North.

They had left Lisbon in August, and had run for the Bay with the half-ashamed thrill of school-boys bent on a project at once gallant and absurd. Huck knew the Spanish tale well enough, and muttered it to the men in a late watch, with the pride of an old retainer to whom the family legends are as his own. But the Bay had been gentle with their little craft, though Huck had felt the edge of it, going out. Indeed, although they were on the Armada road, at the same time of year, they had nothing of the Armada weather, for it held fair all through the North Sea, fair enough even off the Orkneys, through the dreaded Firth, and off the dark red face of Cape Wrath; still fair when they turned from the main Armada route to follow the track of the lost galleon which had driven through the North Channel to break her bones at the foot of Cunswick Fell. Huck, indeed, had been almost troubled by the succession of stormless days, feeling, in his superstitious soul, that the Clerk of the Weather had them in his debt.

And now, although all was well, and he was tasting the full luxury of pride, he was still not altogether content. He would have preferred that Luis should not sail even these last few miles alone. He knew what he was about, of course, and how to tackle the narrow bay. With the flood-tide that was coming, the banks would be safe for a clear run in, and the weir at the bend of the Wythe was so old an enemy as to have become a friend. He would be home before his late crew had finished the necessary toasts to their triumphant cruise. But this was the end of that glorious run which, for Huck, at least, had had the glamour of

romance, and he was reluctant to write it down complete. He had reached the age when every end, as it comes, may very well prove the final end of all.

Luis laughed at his hesitation and lugubrious face. He, too, was wiry and brown, very normal and healthy and brimming with life. When he laughed, his dark eyes danced, and his white teeth shone in the deep tan of his face. His dark head was bare, and he wore a rough blue jersey which had the ram's horns stamped across the chest. He only wanted rings in his ears, Huck thought, to look like the men on the other side of the Bay. But the laugh was very English and frank, and now and again, in a turn of the head, a sudden tone of his voice, a restless movement of his hand, there was something of his brother, the fussy little English squire. Huck wondered why he had never noticed the likeness before. It was there, and it was not there, he said to himself, and was glad when each reminding moment passed, and he could fancy Gaspar still before his eyes. The romance of his life lay in the unleashed Huddleston, not the tame.

"I'm sorry to shunt you like this, but I rather think I want to go alone. I expect to be there in a couple of hours. If the tide served, it would be sooner, of course, but anyhow I should have to wait for the moon. It will be a big moon—it must be harvest, by now—and the bay should be as bright as day. I shall hang about outside, and run in with the tide, as soon as the *Querida* can get her foot off the floor. You'll find her berthed at the old place when you come across tomorrow. Why, she'll almost go in by herself! I'll swear she knows she's going home. She's been pulling at her bit all these last two days. I'm glad to be back, too. It's been fine—*fine!*—but I'm not sorry to be

really here. I got to hate the bay, last year, before I left, but there won't be any trippers holding me up, to-night. There was something cheap about it, somehow,—it got on my nerves ; but it should look beautiful, under the moon. I haven't forgotten the sands, of course, though there ought to be as much water as I need. Well, *adelante ! Hasta luego . . .* see you soon. It has been the time of our lives, and I trust we have placated the gods. Remember you're to dance at my wedding, next month ! ”

He reached his fine brown hand to Huck's horny one, and turned his face to the north. The tide would soon be flowing at Pulton, but there would be another half hour after that before it ran to Arneshead up the channel of the Wythe. Hoisting mainsail and jib, he got the anchor aboard, trimmed the sheets, and went away before the wind and the eye of the sun. Later, he set more sail, for he wanted all the wind there was, but he found sufficient breeze to spin him quietly to the mouth of the bay. The sun was going, but he meant to carry on as long as he could see, and then lay to, to wait for the moon. By the time he got across, it should not be long before the tide served, but he had no wish to hurry before the scene was set. He wanted to go in on a full water, and under the full moon.

Huck allowed himself to be rowed away, but he watched the yacht to the very last, feeling in himself the buoyant thrill with which she rode the thin, elastic waves. She was all grace and beauty to his following eye. It seemed to him that he had never really seen her before, her darting lines and sweeping curves, the balance and motion of her, the lifting, flying, dancing effect of pulsing life which she made across the widening

stretch of sea. She was beaten a bit by her late trip, but the clear evening light redeemed and cleansed her sides, dazzled his eyes with the white of her sails. He could see Luis at the helm, and in that last glimpse was consoled by the dark head behind the boom and the figure's foreign grace. He saw him look in turn from the luff of the sail to the water before, but he never saw him look back. The sun stayed like a red ball waiting for a hand to strike it down. When it dropped at last, Huck shook himself, and turned away. The *Querida* was still in sight, but she was now a gossamer-winged phantom on the grey edges of sky and sea.

The cool English air smote Luis on the cheek, and he smiled, as at something, once disapproved, come, in a moment, to be loved. He was still held by the content of which he had written to Julian, in June. The cruise, in itself, had kept him from all morbid questioning, restless ambition, impatience and fret. He was finishing it alone, in a whimsical mood, and at an unusual hour, but he felt very joyful and normal and sane. He thought distantly of the problems which had faced him in England, of the problems which had faced him in Spain, and marvelled that they should so have troubled his mind. His present world was all calm, very ordered and clear. The future would be clear, too. The warring elements in his blood were surely reconciled at last, fused into one directed strength making for a settled and useful life. Gaspar might have felt something of this, but not all. He had never tried the cure of the old road.

He was coming home in an English lover's mood, for all that he wore the look of the ancient Spanish Main. The quiet English country was sweet to him,

running down to the shore, with the soft, endless ranges of evening-blurred hills clasping it gently round. He wanted the English voices and the English ways; most of all, Julian, who stood to him for the human spirit of the land.

Huck had been right in his foreboding of heart. This was the end, as he had vaguely guessed. Luis meant to sail no more. That had been a wise Huddleston who had built the later Hall where its windows could not sight the bay. Huck should have the *Querida* for himself, a wedding-gift from, instead of to, the groom. He might keep her at the larger fishing-town south, for all those tripping folk bristling with buckets and spades. (At Arneshead he would be too close to Thorns, too temptingly near). The thought hardly cost the present owner a pang. Gaspar's house might be turned into a convalescent home, where minds new-loosed from the prison-house of pain might dream of foreign lands that they would never see.

His brother was very present to him, to-night. Perhaps that accounted for the likeness which had troubled Huck; due, it might be, to the rising of hidden traits of kin, perhaps only to the influence of concentrated thought. But, indeed, Rowly had been with him all the way, even though his own spirit had followed the track of fleeing galleons sunk these centuries of years. He could smile, now, at things which had irritated him, at the time; could weep, even, for what had once aroused his contempt. Stripped of its absurdities, Rowly's had been a noble life; of its morbid fears, a brave death. Nobody need despise either. He himself might be glad if he could do as well.

In the sweet wholesomeness of the evening, Thorns came before him as a tranquil, gracious, English home,

his own good heritage of firm walls, set in its clean, green park beneath the coloured fell. It stood in his mental vision like a tinted picture carved in jade, bathed in clear sunshine after cleansing rain. He forgot the haunting presence ringing it round, creeping to its door, calling insistingly from the hill. In the salt breath of the sea was nothing to bring the heavy scent of death. His brain was vivid and alert, unoppressed by any cloud. He saw plainly the long, blue smoke mounting from his roof, and the long, soft shadows carpeting the garden-paths.

He had come home to stay, as Rowly had stayed, and his soul was at peace. He, too, would tie himself down with the ropes of little duties which had pulled continually at Rowly's heel. He, too, would sit at long tables among dull coats and duller talk. They should make of him what they would, glean from him what they could. He would be punctual, attentive, indispensable, absorbed. He laughed, picturing himself stirring the county dust with a more vigorous broom. Yet he would keep in the groove—a little ahead, perhaps, but still in the groove. The only hope for a Spanish Huddleston was to be heel-roped into a groove.

He did not dread the winter that was so near. He was glad to have left behind the hot airs and fierce suns of Spain, and the greyness of England soothed him like a silk kerchief laid across aching eyes. He could look on all sides without shrinking or hurt, from the farthest horizon to the nearest shore. It was not a dead grey, either, neither hopeless nor drear. To those whose powers of delicate vision were still unscorched, it was indeed no more than a saving veil, a gossamer band through which the lovely colours still glowed in their degree. And over all was that faint, wist-

ful shimmer of gold which stood for Julian in his mind.

She had known herself better than he when she had said that she was not meant to wander afield. A hotter clime would have burnt her up, dimmed her halo, withered her pale grace. This was the only setting in which she could bloom. She would forgive him because he had not understood, because temptation had been too strong; most of all, because she would never have to forgive him again. Together they would make at Thorns that image of gracious life which shone like a gem in the hidden folds of his thought. He could see the pale reflection of her hair in every quiet room.

He had scotched the curse, he thought, with a whimsical but happy smile. He was coming with the humble, asking heart which alone, so it was decreed, could bring happiness to him and his. He was himself his own sacrifice of goodwill, himself the wine in the sacramental cup. He had travelled the old road, as tradition had foretold. Soon he would be knocking at the old door. And, once on the other side, so the legend said, he would cease to wander and forget to fret. He would be soul to soul with his adopted country, dust with its dust. Neither storm-wind nor silence should break his rest. Always he would bide happy, and sleep sound.

He hove to. The light had gone out of the sky, and the sea-mist pressed upon him, bringing him the illusion of being alone in all the world. The *Querida* swung limply to the little heave at her foot, as if she, too, were dead, or feigning death in her sleep. He lost faith in her suddenly, much as one loses faith, sometimes, in the solid floors of one's own house. He found himself counting the inches between his feet and that sliding, heaving depth of sea. He felt that she would

begin to sink if he stirred, the weight of each boot, as it came on the planks, pressing her ever further down. She was not alive to him now, with the vibrant lift and run gone out of her, as out of a shot bird. She was only a frame of timber and cord that had no soul to conquer, no will to arrive.

He told himself that he had been wrong about the grey. This grey, hemming him in, was utterly colourless and drear; cold, too, with clinging eddies, like the touch of a tear-wet cheek. Then all at once he had a glimpse of Cunswick Fell, just the bottom slope and no more, like the neck of a waiting beast thrust forward into the sea. It was land, but it brought him no sense of security, sent him no soundless, welcoming hail. On the contrary, the sight of it emphasised his loneliness to the point of shock.

The thin, ardent flame of exalted joy trembled in him, and died. He shivered, longing for the moon. He slid his hands along the damp gunwales, and withdrew them on a sharp recoil. He found himself wishing, not for Huck, nor for his brown sailor-men left behind, but for Crane. Crane stood for so much that meant comfort and order and assurance doubly assured—the cheer that rings from silver and china, and pours in a flood from built-up fires, the ease which purrs along velvet carpets and curls in padded chairs. He knew just how Crane had tried to screen Rowly from the outer dark, how his thought and care for the physical man had steadied the mind that trembled on the verge. He would have liked him opposite to him in the boat, with his white shirt-front and expressionless mask of a face. He would have felt that Crane could time the moon to a minute, and that the moon, like a fresh course at a perfect meal, would most certainly appear. The

universe would behave to rule, oiled as the household wheels were oiled, and the master of the butler, no more than a rather large cog in the machine, would behave as the masters of butlers should. Yes, he could have done with Crane. He would have liked the Cocker, too, that little, black envelope of leaping life, with the warm tongue and the worshipping, lambent eyes.

He thought at last of Bill, his friend, and at the remembrance of that fair, English face, something in him awoke and uncoiled. On the instant, he was not cold any more, but burning with the fiercest emotion in the world. He looked down at his hands, and saw that they were clenched, the blue veins clear against the tan. He could scarcely breathe, so oppressive was the fury at his heart. His eyes were aching and hot. His teeth showed in a white line. He felt himself groping, scouring the boat for something with which to strike and kill, to blot out that smiling English face beyond the mast. . . .

The phase passed as quickly as it had come. He sank back, shaking, wondering at himself. He had never, at any time, been jealous of Bill, and at this actual moment all his thoughts were kind. Each had played fairly by the other, and, in spite of the silence which had fallen between them, there had been no rancour, no real troubling of the friendly bond. He could speak, at least, for himself, having, indeed, nothing to resent. What, then, had forced that moment of overwhelming hate, for which he had been so totally unprepared? Was the old duel of the nations still unfought to an end, so that even yet the two breeds struck at each other in the lust of possession and pride?

They are laying the Royal Standard on the altars of Lisbon. It shines along the full streets, over the dark

faces looking up. It is heavy with the titles of the King. In the Inglesia Major it is still dusk, for it is early six o'clock, and the incense sullies the spring morning drifting through the open doors. When God takes the Standard, and gives it back, all the guns make salute. This is God's War, for which all Catholic Europe has cried. The big war-galleons are lying in the river, castled at poop and stem. Some of them are more than a thousand tons. We have over a hundred ships and thirty thousand men. We are going forth in the strength of the Lord, and the grace and gallantry of our youth.

He raised his head, finding it sunk between his hands. Over the edge of the mist, a thin gold sickle poised itself in air—the first beginning of the moon. It would not be long before it came, and after it would come the tide, though as yet the bay was empty and asleep.

At sunrise the ship boys sing the Buenos Dias at the foot of the mainmast. At sunset they sing the Ave Maria. The watchword for each day of the week is a holy name, because this is God's War. There are many priests among us, and a poet to whom Love has been unkind.

For three weeks we have been blown to leeward by a northerly breeze. The provisions are putrid, the water is not fit to drink. . . . Now we are sheltering in Corunna, and there is a hospital on the shore. It is June, but the weather is December. It is strange, since we are on the business of the Lord. In such wise, the Duke writes to the King.

Now we are ready once more. Our gaps are filled. We have received the Sacrament, and the wind is fair. We have sailed again in hope and a good heart, because this is God's War. . . . On Wednesday, the wind backed

to the west, and the gale brought us a heavy sea. The waves broke over the galleons, and squandered us right and left. The Santa Aña has disappeared.

When it was over, we drew together again. We are through the Bay, and have entered the English Channel, but the ships of the Dragon are nowhere to be seen. We are in fighting order, like the curve of a sickle when it strikes against the corn. The grey land of England comes up above the sea, no more than three leagues distant from our keels. On the San Martin the Captain-General of the Ocean has run up his own flag, and the guns speak thrice. The ships' companies kneel on the decks, and give thanks. This is God's War.

The moon was a little higher. He felt strangely drowsy, his eyes were heavy. He dipped his hand in the lapping water, and flung it across his face.

It is five o'clock on the Lord's Day, and the sun is just up, and the wind is at our back. The water is very smooth. We are already under the wall of the English coast, Adelante! England the unready is at our feet. Our sickle sweeps on to mow the English corn. . . .

The Dragon is out of his den at last! His ships advance in loose order upon our moving crescent. They are fewer than we, but they are faster, and their guns carry further. They have got to windward, and are firing on us from behind. They will not grapple us side by side, so that we cannot show them the great deeds we would. This is not how honourable men fight. Don Juan Martinez de Recalde has fired a hundred and twenty shot, but the English fire five to his one. His flagship is shattered, and the rigging is all torn. But we are the champions of the sea, and this is the Lord's Day. . . .

The light has gone, and the sea is rising, the wind veering to the north-west. The stern-lanterns flicker over the

waves. Our Lady of the Rosary has fallen to the Revenge, with her powder and her gold. The Dragon has taken the chest of gilded swords meant for the English peers who share our faith. Our Lady of the Rose is on fire, and has slain two hundred of her own men. She burns like a beacon on the dark slopes of the night. . . .

A day of smooth sea, spent in binding the wounds of the ships. His captains are bidding Sidonia rouse himself with the dawn. . . . We are bearing down upon Howard, and will force him to let us aboard. . . . Still they will not grapple us! They run up and down like mocking children in the street. The San Martin has fifty shots in her hull, and the Holy Standard has been cut in twain. All night the divers will be plugging the holes. Many of the ships labour, and three are gone. The wind is lost again. . . .

San Domingo be with us on this his day! The Isle of Wight is under our lee, and in the Roads we will force them to fight us hand to hand. The banners are flying, and the long notes of the trumpets herald us as we go. The tide of battle is with us. San Domingo is with us. . . . We have fought all day, and the powder is giving out. They are thrusting us on the Ower Sands. We are sorely hurt. San Domingo, whose day this is, send a wind!

The Duke has fled up Channel on Domingo's wind, and now we are safe in Calais Roads. El Draque is coming, Achines is coming, Seymour, Frobisher, Howard; but we are still undestroyed. We are the Kings of the Sea, and, should we but reach an arm, England is ours. They are afraid of us, in England. The beacons cry from point to point. Parma is coming to our help with his army and his guns, and then we shall know whether this is God's War. It

is again the Lord's Day, and we are riding on two anchors against the strong flood-tide.

There are devil-lamps moving on the black, midnight sea ! They sail like ships, but they are all ablaze, and roar flaming to the heavens. With the flood behind them, they rush towards us, borne on the fast, black swirl of the tide. We cut our cables and run, shouldering one another, stampeding, unhandy, utterly lost. . . . God, Whose War this is, send the dawn !

The last great battle of Gravelines is at an end. Parma has sent us no help, and we are driving on the Flemish banks. The battle-smoke hangs over us like a cloud. We are torn to pieces, splintered, shattered, ragged, maimed. The galleons sink, one by one. The blood runs along the decks, where the priests move among dying and dead. They have a crucifix in their hands, and the holy words are on their lips, but the roar of the guns flings them away. Even God, Whose War this is, cannot hear. . . . Our dead are in thousands, and there is no powder left, but not a ship has struck her flag. We have endured to the end . . . but this is no end. The wind which fights for England is piling us on the sands. There is no escape unless the wind turns. Behind us is El Draque ; before us are the banks. Now they sound six fathoms . . . now five. . . .

Yet we are not Drake's ! We have fallen into the hand of God, not into the hand of man. He sent the south wind to our aid . . . in mockery to our aid. Now we are flying through the North Sea, and the mists have swallowed us up from the English at our heels. There is very little food, and the water casks have been shot away. They are throwing the horses overboard, because there is nothing for them to drink. The Duke blames everyone except himself. He has hanged Don Christobal at the

yard-arm. There are thousands wounded, thousands sick. The men are hungry and wasting, and always cold . . . always cold . . .

He made an effort to rise, and dropped back. The moon was up, by now, and before him were the black coast-lines of the twisting bay, but his eyes, turned on them, were strange and dazed and blind. The *Querida* was coming back to life, dancing a little, uncertain but thrilling, like an awakened heart beginning to beat. The rising waves clapped at her sides. Each one of them had a message from the coming tide, but he was too far away to hear. His eyelids drooped. His drugged mind surged back.

We lost the fleet off the Orkneys in long hours of fog. Now we are alone in the mist and the rain, and the wind that drives us always like a bartered sheep. We have lost our course, and do not know when we may run ashore. We die daily. There are not enough men to work the galleon, and we are famished and sick, and always cold . . . always cold. The galleon's sides are torn like a hounded beast's, and her sails cannot hang on her broken spars. The huge seas roll over her, and she lies down to them until they toss her aloft to be stricken by the next. If this is God's War, He has fought against Himself . . . unless there be no God. . . .

To-day we saw land before night fell to join the mist. We are driving towards it from the west, drenched, beaten, forsaken, lost. . . . There is sun in the gardens at Santander, crystal water, wine and bread. . . . We drive always on the wind, the unending, roaring, returning, smiting wind. If this is God's War, His own winds fight against Him, the winds that cover England from her foes. May El Draque be cursed! May the torments of all these bitter months be laid to his soul! May the

sunk galleons rise in the night, and lie for ever athwart English bows! May the Spaniard be cursed that ever kisses English lips! May those that come after him know no rest, be torn always between the north and the south, be faithful to neither, scorned of both! May they be miserable by land and sea, suffer the pains of death a thousand times before they come, and see the hand of death in that they fear the least! May the dumb beasts fright them, and gather about the door at their last hour, that they may remember the hatred of Spain! So may God do to the Spaniard who forgets! . . . In the shriek of the west wind there are all the devils in hell. Now we are on the sand, and the waves have her down. . . . In the gardens at Santander there are grapes . . . crystal water . . . wine and bread. . . .

He struggled to his feet, and stood swaying, catching at spar and stay. The moon stood over his head like the flat gold plate which halos a Catholic saint. The tide was coming. The whole water was full of quiver and lilt. Already it must be breaking into the bay. When he could wait no longer, he eased the main-sheet and came about, and at once the *Querida* began to move, as if fighting to get home, but on a motion as smooth as the blade of a skate upon virgin ice. He felt her cleave the water as if she left it permanently sundered behind. At her stem the tide was a golden sheet; at her stern it streamed in a golden lane. Wind and tide were both with her now, the latter stronger than he had thought to find. He was running straight for the fell, meaning to pick up the channel of the Wythe below the point, and straining his eye for the warning finger of the weir, when he thought he heard a cry directly in his path. It startled him in the silence of the night, where the rush of the boat had seemed the

only sound in all the world, but he could see nothing close ahead, peering under the sail towards the darker reaches near the fell. He was still very drowsy and dull, half-consciously keeping the boat on her course, and he told himself that the call had been that of a bird; but when it came again, wailing, insistent, half-human in its note, he knew what it was, and felt terror sweep over him in a mounting wave. With his heart leaping like a bound thing frantic to be free, he clambered forward, and looked over the side, to see nothing at all in the stretch of water before. Still he stood, quivering in every nerve, until the speed of the boat warned him back, but even as he turned he was caught again by the helplessness of the dream. It was then that the cloud went over the moon.

It was dark, but not with the blank, outer darkness trapping his mental gaze. The fresh breeze changed on his inner ear to the shout of a flying autumn gale. Below his stiff form a huge bulk rolled and rose in the trough of untraceable but monstrous seas. The shrieks in his ears were sometimes human, sometimes chorussed by the throats of fiends. Above all, he seemed to hear the melancholy clamour of countless sheep, though, from the fell, where Bill waited, there was never a sound. He felt the thin rags of his clothing cling soddenly to his worn and battered frame. He was cold with the cold of three hundred years and more, hungry and thirsty beyond the point of care; too weak to move, almost too weak to cling, drenched, dying, about to drown, with only one vital spark alive in his soul—the hate of England and the wind, the driving, guarding, God-defying wind, that ringed her with a lover's arm. . . .

He sank to his knees on the deck, clinging to the

shroud. He knew now that more was asked of him than he had already given. Not merely travelling the old road could bring peace to his fated race ; the price was more tremendous than that. He had been a fool to think the curse so easily laid, that curse set by a man on his own head. The first Spaniard had himself been false to his hate, and on his own descending flesh had wreaked his own revenge. He would never go home now to Thorns. He had dreamed it, that was all, and the gods are not to be bought with dreams. Yet, at the last, as the *Querida* drove on blindly through the night, there came to him a vision of England, of pride in her pride. He had loved her, in spite of all. Though he might not have her, he loved her. Not all the Spanish hate that sent him to his death could wrench her tender kisses from his mouth. In her arms he would cease from trouble and regret. In her soil he would bide happy, and sleep sound.

He saw, quite suddenly, a green lane, where a girl walked beside a tall horse. On the horse was a man in a pink coat, who leaned down to her, and spoke, reached his hand for hers until she put it up, with a blush. In her other hand was a blue silk parasol. When they saw Luis, they nodded to him, and smiled. Round the corner of the mist there was no mist ; it was all green and wind-blue and very clear. . . .

Farther down the lane was Rowly, with all the wrinkles smoothed away, and the rest of long days in Heaven in his quiet, blue eyes. He wore a monk's gown with wide sleeves, showing his long, fine hands. In one of them he carried a little painting as he walked, laying on a deeper tint with a slender, delicate brush. It was a picture of the Madonna, in a robe of Italian blue. . . . Dick walked beside him, carrying a curved

palette, gleaming with colours like a tray of brilliant, assorted gems. Rowly was quite silent, but Dick talked all the time, in long, flowing phrases that curled like wind-smoke through the air. Luis could not hear the words, but he saw them before him, clear-cut and many-faceted like other gems, all the clear, translucent thoughts which had had no verbal being in his life.

After that, he lost the lane. He was standing by the door of a room, waiting to be let in. His fingers were on the handle, which was of ivory, and very cool and smooth. It gleamed a little in the dusk. Somebody he loved was on the other side of the door, whose abode was gladness, and whose touch was peace. He pushed at the door gently, and it gave, inch by inch. . . . He struggled to his feet on the deck, stretching his hands before his blinded eyes as the *Querida* came flying up towards the hidden weir. She drove upon it on the sweep of the tide, wrenching off her keel, and flinging him out of her into the dark. The current below the fell snatched and dragged him away. . . . He opened the door, and saw a streak of winter sunlight on the wall.

When the dawn broke, they found him on the shore, half out of the water, his arms stretched wide, as if to embrace and hold the English earth. The tide was dropping, giving up the coldly-shining sands. In the channel of the Wythe the *Querida's* sail was thrust above the steely surface of the sea, like a flag of truce held aloft by an unseen hand. Across country, the sheep were going home, unhasting, unhesitating, deliberate and intent, released by the Power which had driven them forth from the invisible limits of their heaf. As they had come, so they went back, unconscious, harm-

less, melancholy, dumb. They pressed against the hobbled horse as they passed, and he drooped his muzzle to them, enquiring but unafraid. In a long stream which looked itself like a fold of the mist, they poured across the quiet fields to the fells, that were not yet painted on the morning face of day.

The soft September sun came up, warming the wet sands into a sheet of faintly-gilded glass, and the tide into a coverlet of golden-pointed blue; whitening the drowned sail like a sea-bird's wing, and showing the green land threaded with the yellow ribbons of harvest, and the sepia hedge-bands of the eastern marsh. Over at Roselands, Julian still slept, still dreamed that the Fallowfield cherry had bloomed again. Bill knew that, for both of them, exile was at an end. They were of those that always, inevitably return. They would walk together again in their country of the mind.

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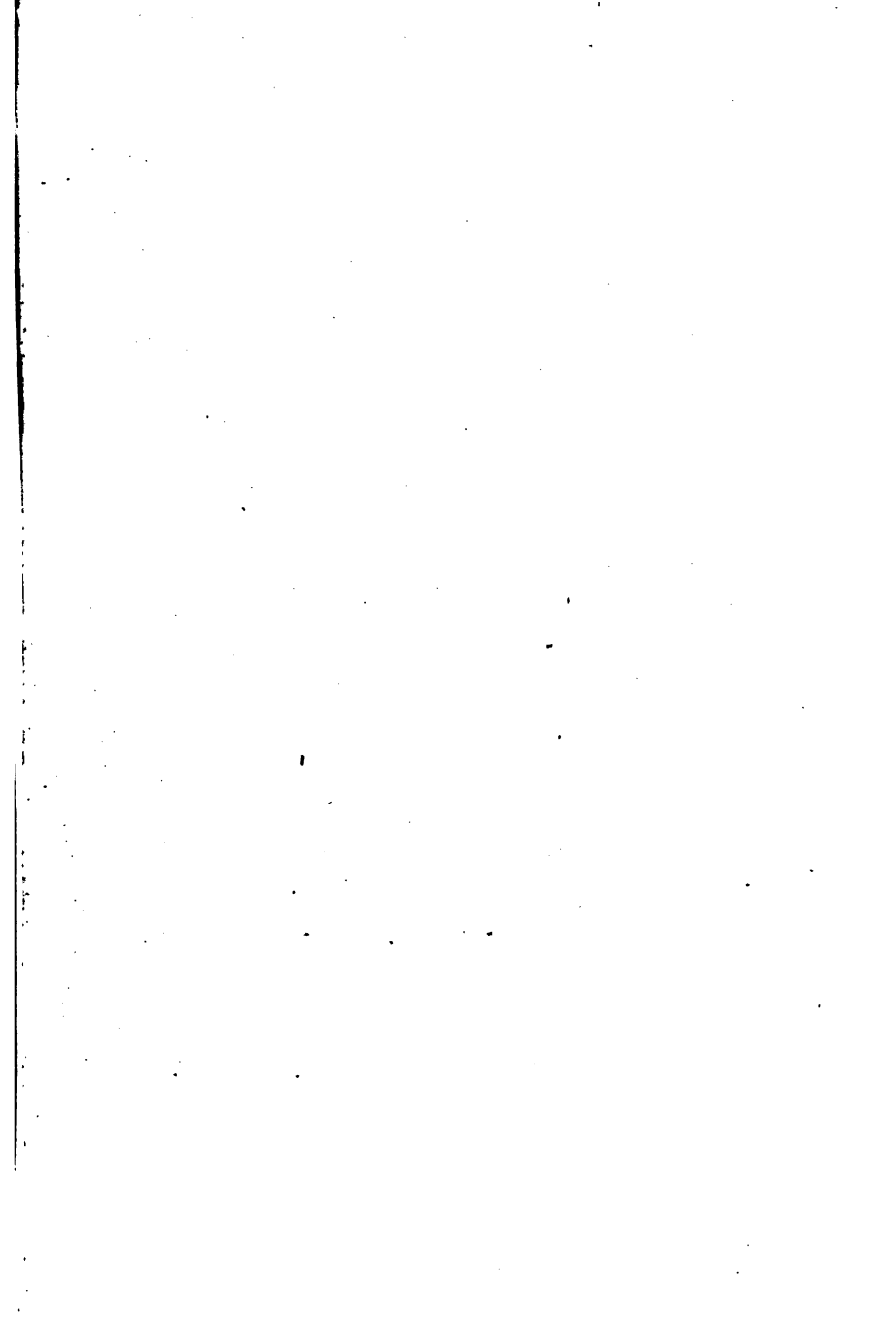
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